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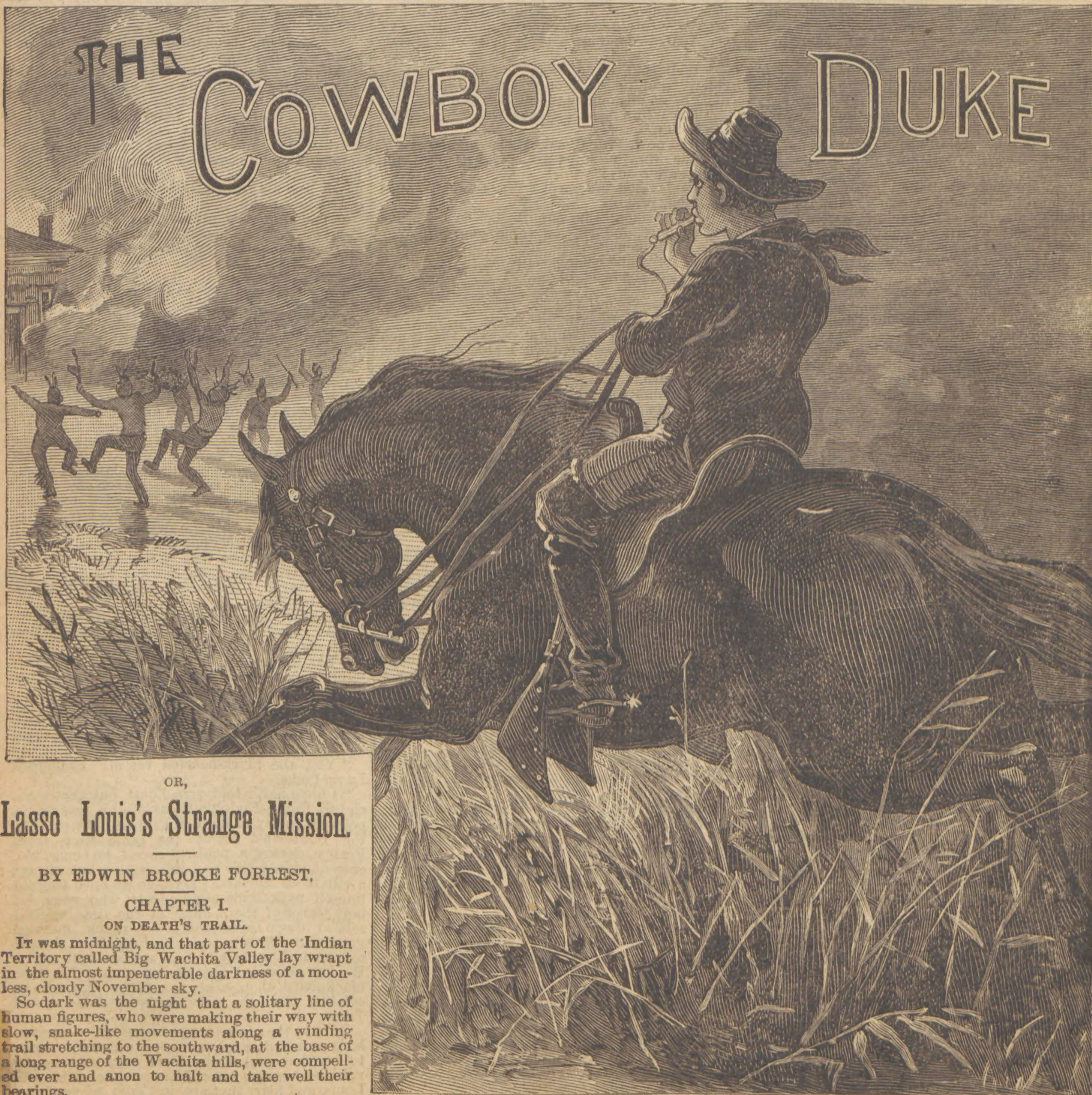
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OR, Lasso Louis's Strange Mission.

BY EDWIN BROOKE FORREST.

CHAPTER I.

ON DEATH'S TRAIL.

It was midnight, and that part of the Indian Territory called Big Wachita Valley lay wrapt in the almost impenetrable darkness of a moonless, cloudy November sky.

So dark was the night that a solitary line of human figures, who were making their way with slow, snake-like movements along a winding trail stretching to the southward, at the base of a long range of the Wachita hills, were compelled ever and anon to halt and take well their bearings.

The shadowy file of human forms were Apache Indians, two-score and ten in number;

THROUGH THE FLAME-LIT SCENE RODE LOUIS, WHILE FROM HIS POCKET HE PULLED A LARGE FIELD WHISTLE. IMMEDIATELY A SHRILL METALLIC SHRIEK RUNG OVER THE PLAINS.

they were well armed, and a U. S. Army rifle was strapped upon the back of each, their black, scarred and battered visages were slashed with red war-paint, and they were "on the war-path" as only this deadly, snaky band of Apaches could be.

The trail they followed led the dusky band to the line of the Texan frontier.

Here they halted, then took up a narrow cattle-trail that wound southward over the Texan plain for two miles, there ending at the outposts of a huge cattle-ranch that lay dim and silent in the black distance.

Suddenly, at a muffled sound from their leader, a brawny chief, looking fully seven feet high, with the face of a demon and eyes that flashed like a panther's, in spite of the dense darkness, the whole band dropped upon their knees in the tall prairie-grass, half creeping, half gliding along like a pack of huge snakes.

At a second low word from the chief the Apaches fell instantly upon their faces, while he stretched his monstrous body at full length upon the grass, placed his ringed ear flat upon the damp sod, and listened without a movement for several minutes.

Not three rods distant, in the very trail the red-skins were following, a solitary horseman, seated upon a long-haired Indian mustang, halted in a light gallop, and seemed trying to pierce the thick darkness enveloping him, gazing in the very direction of the crouching red-skins.

He was a night-ranchman of the ranch lying in the distance, going his midnight rounds, and hearing the faint "swish" of the long, rough grass as it was ruffled by some clumsy Apache, his hand had immediately grasped the butt of his "six," and the intelligent Texan pony had stopped short in his tracks at a whisper from his master.

Simultaneously the Indian leader had stopped short also in his march, hearing, with the keen Apache ears, the soft thud of the mustang's hoofs in the thick grass; and thus the two, really looking straight at each other through the black midnight, but a few yards dividing them, stood for some moments!

Had the night been clear, what a bloody tragedy would have taken place, and how quick the black Texan clods would have drunk the brave blood of the lone ranchman, as the Apache devils rushed upon him like so many prairie wolves, and let the life-spirit out of him with their deadly tomahawks; ay, had the night been clear, what ghastly deeds might have been prevented, what dear lives saved, what things left unchanged, what secrets, plots and dastard schemes left uncovered!

But no; Providence willed it otherwise, and the night held on black as the silent vaults of the unlit cities of the dead. The night-rider, satisfied and little realizing the danger that had been so near at hand, spoke softly to his mustang and moved slowly off in silence on the circuit of his long night vigil, in the center of which circuit arose the dim outlines of the many buildings of the large ranch to which the trail of the Apaches led.

The couchant line of savages slowly arose now, and stole onward toward the ranch, that lay but a short distance from them in the gloom.

As they neared it the line of the savages broke from its single file, and, dividing themselves in pairs, in true Apache fashion, they stationed themselves at various points of vantage among the cluster of buildings of the ranch and awaited anxiously the will of their tall chief, the very grin and fiendish glee of the Evil One himself upon their paint-smeared ugly faces the while.

Suddenly, out from the shadow of one of the outbuildings rode a horseman, the animal a fine blue-bred Kentucky mare, the man, about thirty-five, dark, handsome, well-formed, but with the countenance of a human fiend and arch-villain, and dressed in the picturesque half-Mexican garb of a Southwestern outlaw of wealth and success, and armed to the very teeth.

He rode cautiously up to where the tall form of the Apache chief loomed near a large block-house.

"The great chief the Apaches and brother-in-war of the White Apache, War Cloud, is very prompt," whispered the elegant horseman, in tones of soft, studied flattery.

"War Cloud the Great is always so with the White Apache brother," answered the chief, quietly.

He did not seem to like the soft praise of the first speaker and showed it at once.

"Tis well, War Cloud; to-night's business needs all your promptness."

"War Cloud knows without White Apache's warning talk," said the chief, restlessly.

The tone of his white brother seemed to sound

sarcastic to him to-night, and he chafed under his words plainly.

"War Cloud must not forget his usual grace of manner," replied the horseman, in an irritating tone.

"White Apache talks much with his tongue," and the chief's eagle eye flashed like a tiger's in the gloom.

The other laughed a low, hard laugh that seemed to prick the flesh of the Apache, as it were.

"Your white brother might talk much more," he retorted, significantly.

The great Indian winced visibly, and a shudder ran through his huge frame.

A smile of peculiar satisfaction flitted over the tanned, handsome features of him who spoke. He had a secret power over the Indian, and wished to remind him of it on this particular occasion.

"But War Cloud is no fool," he added, "and so the White Apache will have no need to loose his tongue, eh?"

The tall chief's head dropped low upon his huge chest in abject humility.

"War Cloud is White Apache's brother," he said, humbly, as the fierce fire died slowly out of his eyes, and he assumed an attitude of slave-like servility. "War Cloud is ever at the bidding of White Apache, as the dumb mustang of the Apaches' land leaps at the prick of a brave's spur."

"Well said, War Cloud," said the elegant rider, "and 'tis well, for you well know there must be no misunderstanding between us."

"The White Apache speaks well," responded the Indian, meekly.

"And now, War Cloud, to the night's work, for the very minutes are precious—and the braves are ready?"

"As slaves at the word of War Cloud," replied the chief, proudly.

"Then, sound the signal! Let every brave act at once, and, as you value your life, War Cloud, fail me not!"

And the grand rider rode away in the black shadows of the black night.

CHAPTER II.

THE COWBOY DUKE.

INSIDE of the dwelling-house of the ranch had, in the mean time, been seated at a table strewn with many papers, two persons, a man and a youth.

The former was a large, fine-looking person of about sixty years of age, of distinguished address, and attired in the style of a gentleman ranger of Texas.

The youth was a tall, handsome boy of about seventeen, strongly built, with strengthful limbs and broad chest.

His face was not only handsome, but keenly intelligent, frank and honest, the features fine as a girl's; his hair was short, and curling in light-brown curls over his shapely head.

His dress was quite remarkable; his whole attire was of brown coarse-ribbed velvet corduroy, the short sack-coat, double-breasted, the pants fitting tightly to the limbs, and tucked into a pair of elegant alligator top-boots.

The shirt was of finest white flannel, the collar held together by a flowing tie of blue silk—in the sailor-knot of which sparkled a brilliant diamond of good size—and upon the table lay a Texan sombrero of medium brim, banded with a wide strip of Mexican silver lace.

In a belt of shining silver about the waist hung two gold-mounted "sixes," with pearl handle, and a gold-hilted bowie-knife.

A finer looking specimen of young manhood and the young gentleman ranger of the Southwest could not be conceived.

The man was a wealthy French gentleman, owner of the immense ranch about him, called Mr. Chambertain, or sometimes by the *sobriquet*, "The Ranger Duke," for the Chamber-tains had been titled families in France before the French Declaration of Independence, and the Duke de Chambertain was one of the great titles of the French monarchy.

The handsome youth was his only son, Louis, but commonly called "Lasso Louis, the Cowboy Duke," for he was the champion of Texas with the lariat.

The old gentleman was loved by all who knew him for his honorable and charitable dealings, and Lasso Louis was a favorite with all his acquaintances; and well might he be, for he was ever a friend in need, lavish in his gifts of money to those in want, brave as a lion, a dead shot, and in every way the typical all-around young gentleman ranger of the Pacific Slope.

He was known over half of Texas as the jolly, brave and charitable "Cowboy Duke"; his ene-

mies feared him, what few he had, as they would a half-grown tiger, but his friends loved him as a brother, and almost any of them would have risked their lives, had occasion demanded, to save his.

And there was nothing of the French aristocrat about Lasso Louis; his mother, long dead, had been an American lady of Texas, and, reared in the Texas wilds, he was really all American and the true representative of Young America.

"Louis, my son," spoke the grand old man, laying down some papers he had been reading.

"Yes, father," replied the boy, looking up from an elegant hunting knife he was polishing.

"We have sat up late, my son," continued the old ranger, "for I wish to speak to you of matters of importance both to you and myself."

The boy gazed intently at his father.

"You are to-day just seventeen years of age, and for your birthday gift I will present you some news that I am sure will please you as much as anything could; news I received a few days ago without your knowledge."

"News?" repeated the boy, wonderingly.

"Yes, and rather startling news, Louis; and some of this news is, that I am now really a Duke of France, and that you some day will be a duke, too—you who are now but a 'howling' cowboy!" added the Ranger Duke with a laugh.

"Yes, my boy," he continued, "and let me explain something that I don't think I have before mentioned: Some years before I left France for America, my father, your grandfather, was exiled from France through a political trouble and his estates confiscated. Later his death was reported in some far-away country, after which bereavement, and in political trouble myself, I came to this country poor. It now appears that your grandfather was exonerated after his death, and his estates restored and held by the courts until the heirs could be found, for my whereabouts were not known. Finally some Paris lawyers have located me, and kindly inform me that I am the heir and duly Duke de Chambertain. So, well may they call me the 'Ranger Duke.'"

The handsome boy looked at his father with pleased surprise, but it was not with delighted astonishment.

"You do not seem over agreeably surprised, Louis."

"I am most agreeably for your sake, father," replied Lasso Louis; "but as for me—why, we are rich enough, and I'd rather be the free and easy Texan cowboy I am than all the waxed and high-heeled dukes in Europe!" and the noble youth's blue eyes flashed like those of a true, patriotic young American.

The now Duke de Chambertain laughed heartily at the patriotic speech of his son and looked immeasurably pleased; he, too, cared but little for the great title that now fell to him, for he had learned to love the dear, free land of our fair America better than his native soil by far.

"Spoken like the true young American you are, my boy," he said, looking fondly at the young ranger; "and so much for that, but now for more news:

"We have a most bitter and deadly enemy!"

"An enemy?" exclaimed Lasso Louis, starting up in his chair, and his eyes flashing.

"Yes, an enemy, Louis, who even now this minute, may be plotting against our very lives and fortunes. Listen:

"You have heard of him called 'Rudolph, the Renegade Count,' the 'White Apache,' the dastard villain who revolted with the powerful chief of the Apaches, War Cloud, once."

"Yes, the black-hearted rascal!" exclaimed Lasso Louis.

"I have never told you, Louis, but that man, rightly Count Rudolph Fontbelleuve, was once a political enemy of mine in France. We came to the Southwest about the same time from France, during a political revolt, he being, too, once of an old title and fine estates, but always a villainous Socialist; here, he at once leagued himself with some road-agents who were the holy terror of the country at the time, while I settled down upon this very ranch, married your dear, dead mother, and by hard, honest toil, earned the vast fortune we now both enjoy. He has since led the life of a most heartless blackguard, though always, by his shrewdness, evading the ever too easy laws of Northwest Texas.

"Up to the present time he has never particularly annoyed me, but to-day a message comes to me that makes my blood run cold in my veins, and causes grave fears to arise within me, Louis, and fears that are just ones, as you must know, ay, fears that concern the lives of us both!"

"Great heavens! father," exclaimed Lasso Louis, "what can you mean?"

"Read, answered the old man, and thrusting his hand into an inside pocket he drew forth a soiled, dirty letter, written in coarse but plain handwriting.

Lasso Louis seized the mysterious message eagerly and read the startling words:

"EAST APACHE MISSION,
January 9th, 1885.

"MR. CHAMBERTAIN:—

"DEAR SIR:—Beware! your lives are in danger every hour. I have just overheard a talk between my father, War Cloud, and Rudolph, the Renegade. They have planned a raid to take place at your ranch. As near as I can find out, it is to take place very soon. My father is to gather his terrible band of war Apaches, swoop down upon you at midnight, burn the buildings, stampede the cattle and murder you and Lasso Louis. There seem to be some important persons that Rudolph, the Renegade Count, wants to get in his possession; he told father that they would make him rich, and that if War Cloud helped him get them and murder you all, he would buy him half the Indian Territory for his own, and that his band of terrible Apaches and he could live there a ways. He has an evil power over War Cloud, through his knowledge of some of father's secret raids and murders, and made him swear to kill you and Lasso Louis! So be warned. The terrible blow may come any night. Be ready to fight to the death and win, or all is lost! They may be even as you read this, on the trail of death!

"Your and Lasso Louis's true friend,
"LITTLE CLOUD, SON OF WAR CLOUD."

"Father, father!" exclaimed Lasso Louis, "you should have told me at once! Even now they may be on the war-path!"

"Surely, not so soon, my son!"

"But, who can tell, father? Thank God for the warning!" added the boy.

"And God bless Little Cloud," said the old man, fervently; "he has never forgot the time that you risked your own life to save him from drowning in the Red River when you both went to school at the Apache Mission."

"Yes, Heaven bless him," responded Lasso Louis, "for he has betrayed his own father for our sakes!"

"But I don't suppose he can look upon him as a father," said Mr. Chambertain, "for the good ladies at the Mission have made him civilized like us, and so he cannot think very much of his terrible father, War Cloud, who will be nothing but a savage demon and the terror of the Apache Reservation."

"But, father, we should not sit here this way, for danger may be really near at hand!" exclaimed the young ranchman, arising from his chair.

"You are right, my son; the renegade's plan no doubt is, to kill us, steal my papers and go to France and claim himself to be the heir, having some way heard of my good fortune. We must indeed look to our arms and be in a way, prepared, for God only knows when we may need them, but I feel sure, however, that we are safe for a night or so from the terrible Renegade Count, and the deadly Apache demons; to-morrow we will make all ready for the attack."

Lasso Louis picked up his sombrero from the table, placed it upon his head firmly, and arranged his pistols and knife securely in his belt.

"Father," said he, "I have a strange presentiment that all may not be as well about the ranch to-night as we think."

"I am going to saddle my mustang, Prairie Boy, and make the circuit of the outposts, for, who can tell but what some trouble even now may be going on at them, and you know they are so far off that we could not hear or see it if there was."

"But, Louis," pleaded Mr. Chambertain, "trusty Night-Ranchman Joe is on duty at the outposts to-night, and surely he would report the first sign of anything wrong, as have always been his orders, at once."

"Yes, father, Night-Ranchman Joe would die in his boots to serve us, and I am sure would not neglect his duty."

And indeed would Night-Ranchman Joe do his duty, for only a month before brave Lasso Louis had as good as saved his life.

An Apache half-breed cowboy, of the Chambertain Ranch, and Night-Ranchman Joe, had got into a hot dispute over the stampede of some new cattle, and the treacherous Apache had, when Joe was not looking, rushed up behind him intending to drive his long bowie-knife into his back; but Louis, seeing the act from a short distance, dug the spurs into Prairie Boy, and with a quick fling of his silken lariat, which he always carried, jerked the murderous Apache sprawling upon the ground.

After that, Louis and Night-Ranchman Joe were fast friends, and Joe christened him,

"King of the Silken Lasso," for none but the expert that Louis was could have hurled a lasso at such a distance with so true an aim.

"But," continued Louis, "the Apache wolves would soon do away with poor Joe if they found him in the way, and, father, I shall not sleep until I am certain that all is well, for as I said, I have a strange feeling of unsafety since reading that terrible message."

The manly youth unbarred the huge oaken door, and grasping his silver-mounted breech-loader, said:

"And now, father, I am off to see if safety or danger lies over our heads to-night."

"God bless and keep you, my brave son," said the old man earnestly, "and hurry back, for I shall rest uneasy till you return; the night is dark as the very grave itself, and even your keen eyes, Louis, can scarce see danger five foot ahead."

And with this, the resolute youth went out into the pitchy blackness of the night, saying as he did so:

"Have no fears, father, I shall be back in an hour all safe, but I must know how things are at the outposts, even if there be danger in the black night without."

How little did either the loving father or the strong, intrepid youth dream of the dark, deadly danger that did lay hid in that black night without.

How little did they suspect that death hovered in the black heavens over the ranch like a huge raven bird of prey.

How little did they dream of the death, ruin and desolation that that fatal night was to bring.

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE OF DEATH.

LESSO LOUIS was soon mounted upon his swift little Texan mustang, Prairie Boy, and riding briskly through the darkness toward the outposts of Chambertain Ranch.

It was a little after midnight.

He had ridden about a mile, when the keen-eared mustang came to a sudden halt.

"Danger, Prairie Boy?" whispered his rider.

The mustang elevated his nose.

"What is it?" asked his young master.

The horse sniffed the air of the autumn night significantly.

Lasso Louis grasped tightly the butt of one of his thirty-two caliber "sixes," and tried to pierce the dense blackness ahead, while he listened breathlessly with his well-trained ears.

Prairie Boy sniffed the air again.

"Something is wrong," decided Louis.

He raised his pistol from its holster, and held it in readiness at the side of his saddle.

It was a new and perfect self-cocker and needed no examining; it was ready to deal death at a touch.

Suddenly the dull sound of horses' hoofs reached his ears.

Again the mustang sniffed the air and pulled hard at the bridle.

Louis rested his revolver upon his booted knee.

He now felt that danger was afoot, for at this time the Apache Indians of the Reservation had become restless under the socialistic influence, as it were, of the great Geronimo, and had been upon more than one deadly war-path over the Texan frontier.

The terrible warning that he had just read, too, had put Lasso Louis upon perfect guard, and he now realized he must be prepared any moment to get the first "drop," if occasion demanded, as life depended upon it.

Things were different now from what they were in the days of Houston and McCullough, for the Indians now did not use their often harmless bow and arrow, but managed to arm themselves with the ever-deadly rifle and revolver, as the young rancher only too well knew, and so now kept his self-cocker so as to bring it to bear at an instant's notice.

The soft sound of the fall of horses' hoofs came nearer and nearer.

Louis drew his mustang a little to one side from the apparent course of the approaching horseman.

As the unseen rider came within about forty feet of the watcher, the latter quickly decided to make the first break.

Leaning low to one side of his saddle, and disguising his voice, he called, in stern, demanding tones:

"Who goes there?"

The approaching hoof-falls immediately ceased, but there came no reply.

Suddenly, the almost noiseless "click" of a

revolver sounded upon the silence of the still night.

"Answer! Who goes there, or I fire!" spoke Louis again, leveling his self-cocker.

"Night-Ranchman Joe," said a strange, cold voice.

"You lie!"

And "ping," whizzed a bullet from the boy's weapon, and ping, ping! came two answering shots from the mysterious horseman.

Crack, crack, crack, and the boy blazed away three shots in quickest succession.

"Ha! ha! ha! you're a dandy shot! Better use your famous silken lasso next time!" sounded the cold, mocking voice through the darkness.

Then, amid the clanking of spurs, snorts and thundering hoof-falls, the unseen night-rider dashed away in the blackness.

Louis listened in astonishment till the sound of the fleeing horseman died away in the distance.

"Well, if that wasn't a corker!" he muttered.

"We are, indeed, a couple of beauties; five cracks between the two of us and not a hair raised!"

"But, Prairie Boy, we must not dally here, for there is danger in the air now; that little shooting-match is all the tip I want."

And, at a chirp to the little mustang, the boy night-rider bounded away, back in the direction of the ranch.

He felt convinced that the mysterious horseman was none other than some Apache scout of War Cloud and the Renegade Count reconnoitering before the attack spoken of in the warning letter of Little Cloud.

"Indeed, it might have been the demon Rudolph, the Renegade, himself!" thought Lasso Louis as he dashed along. And he was right, for the invisible horseman was none other than the Renegade Count riding to his tryst with War Cloud!

"And, great heaven! the attack may have been planned for this very night!"

"On, on, Prairie Boy! Father and the ranch boys must be warned at once!" and he dashed his silver spurs into the sides of the mustang and fairly flew over the plain.

As he neared the outbuildings of the ranch, suddenly strange sounds reached his ears.

Faster and faster he urged the flying mustang.

Louder and louder grew the strange sound, till, all at once, it burst into the deafening chorus of yells from half a hundred human throats.

"My God! the Apaches!" gasped the boy, "they are upon us now; the attack is here!"

At this moment a hundred tongues of red flame shot up toward the black heavens from all parts of the ranch. Yell upon yell rung from the assailants out over the now fire-lit plain, and Louis could see plainly the many forms of Apache savages rushing about among the outbuildings of the ranch, screaming out their terrible war-whoop of death and ruin!

Indeed the blow had fallen, in all its horror.

War Cloud, as instructed by the Renegade Count, had given the dread signal to his horde of human devils just as Louis had been nearing the ranch, and with all the demon fury of an Apache massacre. The ghastly scene burst before the eyes of the boy as he dashed on toward it.

The Indians were burning the outbuildings, and as yet, had not got to the dwelling-house.

Through the flame-lit scene rode Louis, when out from his pocket he pulled a large silver field-whistle.

Immediately a shrill metallic shriek rung over the plains, rising above the howl of the savages; it was Lasso Louis's usual warning-call for the mustering of every cowboy on the ranch!

But, the call was not needed, for, as he neared the dwelling-house, thirty cowboys came swarming out, headed by the old Ranger Duke!

"To arms, boys!" cried Louis, as he galloped madly into their midst; "the Apaches under War Cloud and Rudolph, the Renegade Count, are upon us!"

And wheeling about Prairie Boy, he dashed ahead of the rushing cowboys and led them down into the thickest of the Indian marauders.

Once into the fray, Louis fought like a young tiger; right and left he blazed away, and at every "crack" of his flashing self-cockers an Apache yelled for the last time.

Mr. Chambertain fought like the brave old gentleman he was, and the hardy ranch cowboys, fired by the encouraging shouts of "down 'em, boys! wipe 'em out!" of Lasso Louis, rushed into the *melee* like madmen.

A few cowboys fell in the fight, but the Apaches, mad in their own losses lost their skill with their rifles, as they often do in such close conflict, and began rapidly to seek cover.

Then two horsemen dashed with a headlong gallop into the foreground.

One was War Cloud, the great Apache chief; the other the Renegade Count, mounted upon his superb Kentucky horse.

"Rally, my braves!" cried War Cloud, in thundering tones, in the Apache tongue.

"Kill the pale-face!" shrieked the renegade, also in the Indian tongue, furious at the impending defeat. "A hunting-ground to each of you for the scalps of the pale-faces!"

"My sworn enemy, Count Rudolph!" cried the old Ranger Duke, rushing toward the renegade, his rifle at his shoulder.

Before he could reach him, however, a shot from War Cloud's rifle rung out, and the brave old Duke fell to the earth, wounded in the left breast.

"Despair not, father!" shouted Louis; "that is War Cloud's last shot!" and spurring his mustang up to the chief, he clubbed his silver-mounted rifle, and crashed its butt into the head of War Cloud.

It was a terrible blow and settled the great chief of the Apaches forever.

He toppled off his horse and fell heavily to the ground—dead.

"Bravo! bravo!" shouted the fighting rangers; "bravo, Lasso Louis!"

At this diversion the Renegade Count made a bold dash for the dwelling, firing from two revolvers as he flew.

"The papers!" gasped the wounded Ranger Duke; "guard the papers and don't mind me, Louis!"

Louis needed no second warning, but broke into a fierce chase after the renegade.

As the former neared the dwelling, now blazing up to the heavens, his beautiful horse plunged high in the air and then crashed with a heavy thud to the earth, shot dead by a bullet from the blazing revolvers of Louis.

His rider was sent rolling far away upon the ground, and in a few moments Louis would have been upon him, but two faithful Apache warriors quickly seized the apparently lifeless body of the White Apache and hurried away with him in the darkness, while Louis wheeled and hurried on to the dwelling, which was now wrapped in flames.

He burst through the large doorway, from which the black smoke was now pouring, and made a dash for the small iron chest in which he had seen his father place the valuable papers a little while before.

Seizing it, he rushed out of the flaming house, his clothing scorched and blackened, but he himself unharmed, and mounting Prairie Boy, who had waited patiently for him outside, galloped quickly back to where some of the rangers had gently removed his wounded father.

"The papers are saved!" he cried, flourishing the iron casket in the air; "I have them here, father!"

"Thank God!" murmured the suffering old ranger, feebly.

The brave defenders of Chambertain Ranch had utterly stampeded the Apaches, who, seeing the fall of their great chief War Cloud, lost all taste for more fight and disappeared in the darkness, beyond the outposts of the ranch.

They had taken the body of the Renegade Count with them, also their wounded, and the brave ranch boys were trying to corral the stampeding and frenzied cattle.

The many buildings of the ranch were now nearly burned to the ground and were past all help.

"The old ranch is a goner, father," said Lasso Louis, resting for a moment from giving orders in his saddle, beside the wounded Mr. Chambertain.

"Yes, Louis, ruined," answered the old ranger, sadly.

"But cheer up, father; there is plenty more lumber where that came from, and we will build her up brand new."

"I shall never see that, Louis, for even now I am dying, my son!"

Louis sprung from his mustang and knelt beside his father in great alarm.

"But, father, the boys told me it was only a flesh wound!"

"So I told them, my boy, for seeing that I was done for at once, I thought there was no use frightening them or you at such a critical moment."

"God forbid that the wound be fatal!" cried Louis; "I had better ride to Blacktown for the doctor," the tears of a loving son flowing freely.

"No, no, Louis," answered the wounded man; "it is no use now—all will be over in a few moments."

The Ranger Duke's voice grew husky as he spoke and a glassy expression of death came into his eyes.

It would, indeed, soon be over with the grand old man; War Cloud's shot had struck him but a few inches from the heart.

"I have but a few more minutes to live," continued the dying man, "and I must say something of great importance before I go."

Louis knelt closer to his dying father.

"Listen well, my boy; when I settled in this country I had a younger brother, James, who took up land in East Texas, married an American lady, like myself. They had one child, Eugenie, a pretty, dark-haired little girl. When she was about four years old her father died, and I, being the only one for the grave trust, his wife being very frail, mentioned me in his will as her guardian; he had prospered well, and left immense wealth behind him. Not long after his demise, Eugenie's mother was called to France on some important business, which the death of her husband occasioned. At Paris she took very sick and, after a lengthy illness, she was advised to travel for awhile in the far East. With little Eugenie, she went to Turkey and started with a body-guard on a tour of a then rather wild part of the country, for the benefit of its peculiarly fine climate. While on this really dangerous journey, mother and child suddenly disappeared. Later, the Turkish newspapers announced that a band of fierce and lawless Arab slave-dealers had attacked their body-guard, killed all but one, who, fatally wounded, lived but long enough to tell the terrible tale to some natives, and putting in captivity the mother and child, the mother dying from the dared fate soon after.

"The Turkish authorities tried but failed to find the child or bring the culprits to justice.

"Now, I must confess, my son, that I did not take just action in the fearful misfortune; many years before he died, in fact, just before you were born, my brother cheated me most meanly out of a large amount of money through the evil influence of this very Renegade Count who had wormed himself into his graces, after which deed I banished him and his from my memory as best I could and never saw him again until I looked upon his dead face. So it is that I have never told you of the family, or taken any active part in the matter of the misfortune to his wife and child. But some time ago, my son, my conscience smote me, and I came to realize for the first time that my indifference had been almost, if not quite, a sin, for, the wife and child, my sister-in-law and niece, had done me no harm. I immediately ordered long and explanatory notices to be inserted in all the Turkish papers. A few days ago a letter came to me written in French from one Arbiah Pasha, who claims to be a good and well-to-do Turkish gentleman of Constantinople, and who is positive my niece is in the possession of some one he knows as a slave, and says that if I will remit him a certain fabulous amount of money, he will have the lost Eugenie quietly restored to me.

"Now, I am satisfied from his letter, that it is he who owns Eugenie as a Turkish slave, and wishes to extort a fortune out of me for her deliverance.

"And now, Louis, hear the last request of a dying man! After my death go you to the far-off country of Turkey and devote your life and fortune—for I have willed you everything—if need be, to finding your poor long-lost cousin, gaining her deliverance, and restoring to her her fortune. And listen! You are a shrewd, brave lad; spirit her away if you do find her at this Turk's, for I am sure he would, if you tried to purchase her, try to swindle you out of such a price as would now, being you are under age, almost cripple you. If you appealed to the authorities, there would be the dark disgrace to her of being once a servant, a slave, for a legal course would necessarily entail full exposure. Such is my dying request, Louis; and now swear to me, my brave boy, that you will do all that lies in your power to execute this great trust."

"I swear by the God above us that I will give my life to your wish," said Lasso Louis, earnestly, holding gently in his own the cold, clammy hand of his fast-expiring father.

"God bless and keep you, Louis!" exclaimed the father at the brave words of his handsome son.

"And now as to yourself, Louis:

"When you become twenty-one you will be a Duke of France and rich, and although I know

well, Louis, that you do not care for the grand honor of the great title, with your brave young American heart, at least claim your estates in France when the time comes, and let the world and poverty-stricken humanity ever bless you for the same kind deeds of charity and bravery as have made you loved by half of Texas."

"Your will be done, father," Lasso Louis solemnly answered.

"And now, Louis, good-by," whispered the dying man.

"Good by, father," murmured Louis, the manly tears raining from his eyes; "Heaven keep you!"

"Amen!"

"And the old duke's face grew pallid in the death-agony, with the red flickering light from the slumbering flames of the burned ranch falling in ghastly shadows across the stony features and sightless eyes.

And as he bent there, in his grief over the dying, Louis heard these startling words in a husky whisper from the cold, compressed lips:

"If he be not dead, beware—beware—of RUDOLPH, THE RENEGADE!"

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE CLOUD.

THE next morning dawned sunny and bright over the still smoking ruins of the once noble Chambertain Ranch.

Louis had taken a few hours' rest in one of the half-burned outbuildings, but had not slept a wink.

The sad death of his father, the horrors of the terrible night and the strange warning from the lips of the dying Ranger Duke, had driven sleep far from the eyes of the boy ranger.

Through all the rest of the night he thought of the story of the lost cousin, how he would be a Duke of France at his becoming of age, and of the long journey he must at once take to the far-off country of Turkey to search for the missing Eugenie Chambertain.

And now, on this morning, he fully realized the heavy responsibilities resting upon his young shoulders.

And a better youth could not have been found for the grave duty that was now Lasso Louis's commission.

He was standing near the smoking ruins of the dwelling, sadly contemplating the black wreck before him.

Suddenly, around from a partly burned barn galloped a dark, handsome boy horseman about fifteen, with flowing black hair that shone like onyx in the sunlight.

"Little Cloud!" exclaimed Louis, in warm welcome, in spite of his sad heart, as the young half-breed dismounted.

They shook hands like two brothers, so cordial was the greeting of each.

"And you are not mad at me, Lasso Louis?" asked Little Cloud.

"Mad! why should I be angry at you, Little Cloud?" and Louis retained the close clasp of the young Apache's hand.

"Put it there, Little Cloud," said he, heartily. "Let us still be the best of friends, despite this terrible night's work!"

"I know all, Louis, and I came here to pledge you my friendship anew."

Little Cloud and Lasso Louis were the best of friends, and had been ever since Louis had saved the young half-breed's life, three years before.

Little Cloud was a most intelligent fellow, a good shot, good rider and general ranger, and had got quite an education from the kind ladies of the East Apache Mission.

Louis thought a great deal of him, for he well knew that Little Cloud was his most loyal and faithful friend, and had surely proved himself such by betraying the vile plans of War Cloud and the Renegade Count which he had chanced to overhear.

Little Cloud's—now dead—mother had been a respectable Swedish emigrant, while War Cloud had been a most cruel father and treacherous savage, whose death he had small cause to regret, and when he came to repledge his friendship, Louis Chambertain knew how strong that friendship was, and looked upon the bright half-breed as a brother.

"And now, Little Cloud," Louis said, "as we are friends and brothers I shall ask you to go with me on a long trail, to a far-off country, beyond the great ocean, called Turkey."

"To Turkey!"

"That's what I said," replied Lasso Louis, smiling at the surprise of Little Cloud.

"Well," answered Little Cloud, "I am with you, you know, through thick and thin; where you go I will also go; but you must tell me all about it; as your brother I should know all."

"Of course you should, Cloudy," and Louis proceeded to relate the whole strange and romantic story to the deeply interested half-breed.

"And," added Louis, "you are the only fellow, Cloudy, I would trust to go with me; but I know I can depend upon you every time, and together we will brave the dangers of this far-away country and do our best to fulfill my father's request. The trip may prove great fun, too, Cloudy, for I am tired of old Texas after all that has happened. We two can show the heathen Turks a Western trick or two and have some sport with their Serene Highnesses.

"But, how about a real, live, blue-blooded duke and a mongrel-blooded Indian traveling together, Louis?" said Little Cloud.

"Stow that, stow that, Cloudy," laughed Louis. "You are my friend and brother and that is good enough for us both, so, as we have nothing now to keep us here we will at once prepare for the over-the-sea trail."

In a few days Lasso Louis and Little Cloud had completed all arrangements for their remarkable trip. The ranch was placed under the able management of an experienced overseer or "boss," and then they took their leave on a bright morning upon their trusty mustangs, which they had decided to take with them.

CHAPTER V.

THE FACE IN THE DARK.

"Ah, there, Cloudy!"

"Ah, there, Duke!"

"How do you like it as far as you have gone?"

"Great! More fun than you could put in all Texas!"

The scene was a very pretty smoking-room in a beautiful residence in one of the fashionable avenues of Paris, France.

The speakers were Lasso Louis and his faithful friend, the bright and intelligent Little Cloud.

They had arrived a few days before and were the guests of the French gentleman, whom the papers and will of his dead father appointed as Louis's guardian.

They had made preparations at once for their journey to Turkey. The young Duke had purchased at Baltimore, a nice and well-fitted steam yacht, which he had named the *Texan Mustang*. In this snug craft they had crossed the ocean to Havre; thence dispatching the yacht to Marseilles, the two boys proceeded to Paris to see the guardian and arrange all things with him. This was done, and now we find the young Americans enjoying their last day in the gay capital—"overhauling the log," so to speak, of their projected cruise up the Mediterranean. Each had been delighted with all they had experienced, and now that the long trail was to be struck, they reckoned all up to this point in the terms expressed.

The boys were "originals," certainly, in the gay city, but by no means "lost their heads." On the contrary, they astonished the guardian by their decision and intelligence, so he had favored them with all manner of good services; and when, that evening they started by rail to join the yacht at Marseilles, it was with his "Godspeed! messieurs!"

The yacht, commanded by a level-headed American named Lyons, was awaiting them, and on their arrival with no delay steamed out through the vast shipping of the great seaport town, and went howling swiftly down the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

After a swift run before strong winds and through as favorable a sea as ever parted for a good ship's prow, the beautiful *Texan Mustang* steamed up the Straits of the Dardanelles, and then around into the Golden Horn, the magnificent seaport of Turkey, and cast anchor among the vast network of craft from all parts of the world that lined the curving "Horn," just as the golden Eastern sun was setting.

After giving a few orders to his crew and their commander, Lieutenant Lyons, the Cowboy Duke, as he was now generally called, and Little Cloud, found themselves at last upon the soil of Turkey, and actually riding along the streets of Constantinople on the backs of their hardy mustangs, which they had brought with them, among the Turks!

"Lord, Louis!" exclaimed Little Cloud, as they rode along the busy quay swarming with astonished and gaping Turks, "are we really here?"

"Yes, Little Cloud, for better or worse," said Louis, gazing wonderingly about him at the odd people who were glaring in wonder at the strange sight of the two young Western rangers mounted on their own Texan mustangs in their midst.

"And where will we make for, Louis?"

"Right for the residence of Arbiah Pasha. I will say we have come in the interests of my father, not letting him know of his death, as he might try to take more advantage of us; he will evidently extend us an invitation to become his guests, and we must visit him for a few days and endeavor to ascertain if my cousin is really owned by him as a slave, as my father suspected, and as my guardian also mistrusts, and," continued Lasso Louis, "we must do some detective piping and see whether the suspicion is correct or not before we come to any bargain as to her purchase, and in the mean time try to spirit her away, should we find her there, as I strongly suspect we will, for my father really advised me to do this, if I found it possible and practicable, and thus avoid the disgraceful exposure legal action would entail, or the being mercilessly swindled out of the fortune the old Turk would no doubt demand for her freedom, knowing now that she is an heiress and that we are people of money. You see, from his letter, he is undoubtedly an unprincipled old rascal."

The boys then consulted an English bureau of information and soon found out how to reach the residence of Arbiah Pasha.

Presently they galloped into its entrance, and found it to be a large and beautiful Turkish villa, situated upon the sunny shores of the Bosphorus Strait, in a quiet suburb of Constantinople.

Arbiah Pasha received them with unbounded surprise, but a warm welcome. He spoke French very well, and, Louis's father having taught him that language long before his death, there was no need of an interpreter.

The old Turk, whom the Cowboy Duke perceived at once to be a deep and cunning man, bid them accept his hospitality as long as their stay in the East would last. The young ranger neatly postponed all talk on the matter and purchase of Eugenie until the morrow, saying he was much fatigued, while Arbiah Pasha made great effort to amuse the boys. But had he dreamt of the real errand of the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud, how different would have been his attitude!

After a hearty and pleasant supper with Arbiah Pasha the two young Texan rangers repaired to the beautiful flowery gardens that surrounded the villa, for a stroll, so Louis told the old Turk, but really to talk over the strange affair of the lost Eugenie Chamberlain.

Arbiah Pasha had given them some fine Turkish cigarettes, and, apparently enjoying these hugely as they walked along, they were really "sizing up" things.

"Now, Little Cloud," said the Cowboy Duke, "the first important thing to do is to delay coming to business at once with the old Turk, and find out if my cousin is really a slave in his household."

"You say she can speak English, Louis?" asked Little Cloud.

"She could not have forgotten her mother tongue."

"Then I have a plan."

"Out with it, Cloudy! Small plans thankfully received on this particular occasion," laughed Lasso Louis.

"But it may not be so small, Louis; it is this: Let us address, if necessary, each and every one of the young slaves we see about the house in our own language when the opportunity arrives, and the one who answers us in English can be none other than your cousin, Eugenie Chamberlain."

"Bully for you, Cloudy!" replied the Cowboy Duke; "by George! but you are not such a bad bit of a detective, for of course no other of these poor slave girls can speak any language but their own native tongue."

"And she may have been among the very slave waitresses who served our supper this evening, Louis," eagerly added Little Cloud.

"If so, would to Heaven I had known which she was; by old Texas, she would not have to wait upon us a second time, for we would have made a stroke for her rescue this very night!"

And the keen blue eyes of Lasso Louis, the Cowboy Duke, flashed in a way that made him look as fierce as a Colorado road-agent exclaiming, "Hands up!"

"But we must not be too fast, Louis," said Little Cloud, "for one step too bold might spoil everything; we must be patient and Providence will help us—ay, the spirit of your dear, dead father may prompt our actions and guide us aright in the great work of our time."

"Well spoken! my brave Cloudy," exclaimed Louis; "indeed, we must bide well our time, and when we make the stroke for my dear cousin's liberty, that stroke must be as sure as the sun itself, for Arbiah Pasha, it is plain, is a

great power here and one false stroke might mean the death of us."

"Yes," said Little Cloud, "I am confident that nothing but clean, fine work on our part can save her whom we seek from this powerful old Turk."

"Anyway, I will spend my fortune—ay, my very life in the good cause, Cloudy, but I am sure that with the craft and experience the wilds of Texas have given us we will prove no weak rivals to these brown, smoked-out Turks."

And the Cowboy Duke glanced with scorn at the Turkish guards, clothed in their loose uniforms of yellow and red, and smoking their long pipes, who were pacing through the immense rose-gardens on their beats of incessant watchfulness, for it was now quite dark.

All at once, as they were strolling along, Lasso Louis stopped short and glared fiercely ahead at a dark clump of rose-bushes, while he grasped the arm of Little Cloud.

"'S death!"

"What, Louis?"

"Look ahead!"

"But I see nothing."

"Fix your eyes on that dark clump of rose-bushes ahead of us."

"Yes."

"Tell me what you see."

"A dark face!"

"Look again."

"It seems to be the face of a Turk."

"Where?"

"Peering through the rose-leaves."

"Yes; it is moving back and forth like the head of a snake!"

The ranger boys now stood still and pretended to be engaged in earnest conversation; while under cover of this pretense, they watched without a wink the mysterious, ghostly face of the seeming hidden Turk.

"There, it is gone!" whispered Little Cloud.

"There, it comes again!"

"What does it mean?"

"It seems like the face of a ghost, Cloudy."

"Yes, for see!" it has disappeared again!"

A deathly silence now hung over the dark, shadowy rose gardens.

"But do you believe in ghosts, Louis?"

"Of course not."

"Then what is it?"

"The face of a human being!"

"But, what does it mean, Louis?"

"Some one is secretly watching us."

"And has heard what we have said?"

"Yes."

"A spy of Arbiah Pasha's?"

"Likely."

"Then we are lost!"

"Not so surely."

"Why?"

"The strange face may not have heard."

"And we were not talking loud, Louis."

"No; we were really talking in low tones."

"Then we may not have been heard."

"I hope to Heaven not."

"Hist! there it is again!"

The Cowboy Duke grasped the butt of one of his trusty self-cockers.

"Don't shoot yet, Louis."

"Hist!"

"What?"

"Only a scare."

But just as Lasso Louis raised his revolver to fire over the mysterious hidden head, a strange thing occurred.

The pistol almost dropped from his half-paralyzed hand!

"Look there, Cloudy!"

"Yes, the ghostly face!"

"Quick! look again!"

"Yes!"

"Do you see it plainly?"

"Yes, now!"

"Don't the face look familiar?"

"Yes! Heavens Louis! it is the face of Rudolph, the Renegade Count!"

"Hist! Yes, it is the face of him, the demon! It must be!"

"I could almost swear to it, Louis."

"Not a word."

"What will you do, Louis?"

"Keep perfectly quiet."

"Going to shoot?"

"Yes."

"To kill?"

"Yes."

"Don't miss!"

"Not this time!"

"Now, here goes!"

And the Cowboy Duke, leveling his self-cocker slowly in the direction of the moving face, blazed away with two crackling shots in a quick succession.

Then, the two boy rangers rushed into the clump of rose-bushes to where they had seen the dark, snake-like head moving between the thick foliage.

Not a thing was to be seen, not a sound was to be heard!

"Missed!" said Little Cloud.

"Missed," echoed Lasso Louis, dejectedly.

"It's very mysterious, Louis."

"Yes, for it was a dead sure thing."

"Did you see the head when you fired?"

"No; it just then disappeared."

"Then why is it strange?"

"Because I shot *instantly at the spot from whence the head disappeared!*"

"Then it is mysterious."

"It must have been the face of the Demon, himself," said Louis, sarcastically.

"No, Louis, it is this."

"What?"

"The face seeing the movement of your gun, instantly made away before you drew the bead."

"It must be so, Cloudy, for I had the aim dead onto it, and pulled on the second."

"And it might have been a ghost, Louis."

"Rats!"

"But the ghost of the Renegade Count."

"Chestnuts! and we are not sure that the fiend, Rudolph, is dead yet."

"And was it his face at all, Louis?"

"We *may* have been mistaken, Cloudy."

"How could he have followed us all these thousands of miles?"

"He couldn't have."

"And his death was reported all over Texas before we left."

"Yes, Cloudy; it was supposed that when I shot his horse from under him the night of the bloody Apache battle, the fall he took proved his death."

"Then how could it have been his face?"

"It don't seem possible that it could."

"Yet we could swear to it almost."

"Yes."

"But we will not know any more than we do now this night."

"I don't think so."

"Then let's retire."

"And sleep on the head of this spirit-medium business?"

"Yes, and to-morrow we'll commence our case in dead earnest."

"Good idea, Cloudy."

And the two brave and philosophic boy rangers strolled back to the house and turned into their bed and slept as sound as though the strange adventure of the night had never been.

They were made of too stern stuff to scare at such a thing, although many a strong man could not have slept after the mysterious, ghostly affair that had just happened in the dark, silent gardens of the Turkish villa.

And on through the quiet night they slept the sound, nourishing repose of the brave, honest and healthy in spite of the stern, cold fact that they were in a strange, far-off land, away from all friends and home, and resting under the roof of a man who, had he dreamt of even the ghost of their secret mission, would not have hesitated a moment, but have ordered his Turkish guards to sever their heads from their bodies with hardly a word of warning!

CHAPTER VI.

EUGENIE CHAMBERTAIN DISCOVERED.

THE next morning the young Texas rangers rose early and were presently seated before a flower-covered table in a cool bay-window, where their breakfast was being served by many young girl attendants.

Arbiah Pasha had not yet arisen, and Lasso Louis and Little Cloud were breakfasting alone, much to their pleasure and good fortune as will presently be seen.

Indeed, it proved to be a godsend that the old Turk chanced to oversleep this fatal morning and did not accompany Lasso Louis and Little Cloud at their hearty morning meal.

As the beautiful slave girls began bringing in the steaming trays of savory fried fish and eggs and steaks, the Cowboy Duke said in a low whisper:

"Now, Little Cloud, watch well and see if you can distinguish in any of these girl slaves anything encouraging."

"I will with all my eyes, Louis."

"And here comes some now, Cloudy! look well!"

"Yes."

At this moment in marched a line of slave waitresses fair to behold, each bearing a tray of smoking viands.

With their keen eyes, the boy rangers searched the faces of each with closest scrutiny.

Suddenly, the eyes of both simultaneously became riveted upon the face of a certain one of the slave girls.

She was a beautiful young girl, a brunette, and had a look of superior intellect upon her face.

In appearance of dress she in no wise differed from her companions, but her face, with its brilliant black eyes and half-scornful mouth, marked her plainly from the rest.

"By Texas Jack!" exclaimed Little Cloud softly, "that one might be your lost cousin, Eugenie Chambertain."

"She don't look like a Turkish girl, anyway, Cloudy."

"Not a bit, Louis."

"See! what an intelligent face she has."

"She seems to act disgusted like, too, Louis."

"What if it should be she?"

"I'd yell for joy."

"It really may be, Cloudy!"

"I'd bet an Indian mustang, Louis."

"If I only knew."

"Why not find out? Speak to her!"

"I hardly dare, for fear of exciting suspicion. She might show great surprise, and that would be noticed by that pesky young Turkish guard over there by the door."

"That's so; what's he there for?"

"To watch the poor slave girls."

"That's bad for us."

"Very."

"These confounded guards are as thick around here as Apaches in the Reservation in winter time."

"That's the Turkish of it, Cloudy."

"How can we dispose of him?"

"That's a sticker."

"A regular fifteen puzzle."

"We must be very careful."

"And watch our chance."

"That's our only salvation."

"Make the grand stroke when no one is looking."

"But will his Turkish nibs, there, ever take the hint that his company is not wanted?"

"We must watch and wait."

"Yes, we must patiently watch and wait."

But the hoped-for opportunity came sooner than they expected.

Arbiah Pasha, who was just getting up, ordered his morning bath prepared, and all the slave girls, except the intelligent looking one who had so suddenly attracted the attention of Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, hurried away, Turkish guard and all. She alone was left to serve the remainder of the breakfast to the two boy rangers.

As she thrust aside a heavy curtain and entered the breakfast-room bearing a tray, the Cowboy Duke whispered excitedly:

"Now is our time, Cloudy! It might not be our luck again to see her alone like this."

"What shall I say to her?"

"Mention her name as if to me, but loudly."

"Very good."

"She will surely show some sign."

"Yes, if she is the right one."

And Lasso Louis, in a plain voice, spoke the name:

"Eugenie Chambertain!"

Like magic the name acted upon the seeming Turkish slave.

She was now arranging some dishes about the breakfast-table, and at the sound of the name, glanced at the two boy rangers in wild astonishment.

"See! she recognizes the name!" exclaimed Little Cloud, in a low whisper.

"The stroke told, Cloudy."

"It's she, Louis!"

"Can it be?"

"It must be."

The Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud now fairly trembled in their intense excitement.

The slave waitress continued to glance in great surprise at the two young Texans as she absently placed the dishes.

"Now, to know all!" whispered the Cowboy Duke.

"Yes, make a bold stroke, Louis!"

The Cowboy Duke arose from the table and addressed the fair young slave in a most polite manner and in these words:

"I beg your pardon, miss, but may I ask you your name?"

"Now, to see if she speaks English!" thought Little Cloud, looking on with eager eyes and open mouth.

For a moment the fair slave girl did not answer; then, throwing back her dark head proudly, and speaking in the bold, fearless tones of the true American girl, she spoke in English as pure as the Cowboy Duke's:

"My name?"

"Yes, miss," said Louis, while he and Little Cloud tried hard to control their immense joy at her speaking English.

"Why do you wish to know my name?"

"For the best reason in the world."

"What is that?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"It's a secret!"

"A secret?" And the beautiful slave glared at the Cowboy Duke in amazement.

"A dark secret," repeated Lasso Louis.

"This is all very strange!"

"You will think so when you know all."

"When I *know* all?"

"Yes."

The young girl seemed fairly overwhelmed with wonder.

"But please to tell me your name, miss," entreated Louis.

"You must know it?"

"I must know it."

"Zara!"

"Zara?"

"Yes."

"She's a smart one, too, I'll go an Apache's scalp," said Little Cloud to himself, "and it's her."

"Simply Zara?" pursued the Cowboy Duke, feeling somewhat baffled; could it be possible after all that he was on a wrong scent? No, for she *spoke English*.

"No, impossible," he said, to himself.

"That is what I am called," said the slave girl, in strange denial.

"Called?"

"Yes."

"But your *true* name?"

"I have told you!" answered the young girl, in stern, cold tones.

"Wrong!" muttered Lasso Louis, dejectedly to himself.

"Our first stroke has failed to connect," thought Little Cloud.

And the stout hearts of the two young Texan rangers sunk within them.

"But hold!" cried the Cowboy Duke, suddenly, as an idea struck him.

The young slave girl, who was about to depart from the room, turned about, and boldly faced Lasso Louis.

"Well?" she said, coolly, throwing herself in an imperious attitude.

"Do you think us friends, or enemies?"

"I don't know."

"Your opinion?"

"You may be either," she answered, with a queenly toss of her head.

"But we are *friends*," said Lasso Louis, emphatically.

"You *say* so."

"I can *prove* it."

"Prove it, then."

"You must first tell me your true, Christian name."

"Then you do not believe my name is Zara?"

"I do not."

"Why?"

"Because your real name is Eugenie Chambertain!"

It was a bold stroke, but it told.

The face of the slave girl grew deadly pale.

The Cowboy Duke was bound not to be outwitted by a young girl, for he felt that he was on the right track.

"Am I right?" he demanded, sternly, looking keenly at the girl Zara.

"You are right!"

"I thought so."

"You *knew*!"

"Yes, I knew."

"How?"

"Because, *you are my cousin!*"

"Your *cousin*?"

"My cousin."

"This is some terrible, black mystery."

"The mystery is solved!"

The face of the slave girl grew paler, and a strong trembling came over her; she felt that the horrible, dark secret that she knew had long surrounded her, was about to be shattered from over her head by the light of truth from the handsome Cowboy Duke.

"Explain!" she gasped; "tell me of this strange mystery!"

Then, the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud told all from beginning to end.

"And I am your own cousin," concluded the Cowboy Duke. "Louis Chambertain by name, but more commonly known as 'Lasso Louis, the Texas Ranger,' and the 'Cowboy Duke,' as I am the future Duke Chambertain; and this young gentleman," turning to his boy pal,

"is my best friend and pard, Little Cloud, and both Western rangers, scouts, trappers, etc., at your service."

"Yes, at your command," put in Little Cloud, making a fine bow.

"And found at last!" said Louis.

"Yes, Cousin Louis, after all these years!" spoke the young girl, Eugenie Chambertain, for it was really she!

And then the young girl explained as best she could about herself.

She remembered being captured by the brig-and slave-dealers, being taken to Constantinople in company with other young slaves, after a long captivity in some mountain region, and sold to Arbiah Pasha, and being given the name "Zara" by the master-guard, but always remembering her true name.

She had received good care in the household of the Turkish gentleman, had managed to study considerable from some stray English books she had come across, and her duties had been the most responsible in the household, as she had soon proved herself much more intelligent than the other slave girls.

She had tried to explain to the Turkish guards and every one about the slaves' quarter of the villa that she was an American girl, that they had no right to hold her as a slave, but she could only speak her own language, and could not make them understand. And, after coming to know something of the Turkish tongue, and she had protested against her bondage, they had only laughed at her and kept closer watch on her movements, so that she never saw any one but the villa people and could not escape or make her secret known outside. And thus the years had rolled on.

Eugenie was almost overwhelmed with delight, of course, but controlled her feelings like the shrewd girl she was. She thanked Lasso Louis with all her heart, explained that at first she had thought the boys might become secret enemies, and so had kept upon her guard, but just at present, time was too short and dangerous for many thanks, long explanations, or, the glad exclamations that they all three were almost dying to indulge in.

"And now for your rescue, cousin!" spoke Lasso Louis, in a low whisper. "We must make some arrangement right now, for time is precious, and the guards may come in at any moment."

"Blast the guards!" exclaimed Little Cloud, his Apache temper rising, and his American patriotism now all aroused.

"But we must be very prudent, my friend Little Cloud, for the young Turkish guards watch me very closely lately, and they are as keen-eyed and cunning as your own Western savages," said the young slave-girl.

"Then you know something of our jolly Western life?" asked Little Cloud, eagerly.

"Yes, I have been fortunate enough to self-educate myself somewhat, and have read a few American books that have made me a fond admirer of your grand, free America, and you see I was really born there."

Little Cloud was delighted, and in his rough, good way, exclaimed:

"Then let's shake, Miss Eugenie."

The beautiful Eugenie Chambertain grasped the brown, strong hand of Little Cloud, and gave it a hearty shake.

"And we are friends, Miss Eugenie?"

"The very best, Little Cloud."

But the fair girl hardly realized that in the rugged little half-breed Apache she had made at once a friend who would have given up his very life for her benefit had she but asked it.

The Cowboy Duke smiled and said:

"Now, for the plan of escape; Cousin Eugenie, you must be saved this very night."

"So soon?"

"Yes, for delays are dangerous."

"Yes," added Little Cloud, "for your Turkish master might smell a rat."

"But how can you save me?"

"With a little nerve," replied the Cowboy Duke, coolly. "Now, listen well."

"I listen."

"To-night at twelve o'clock, a small rope ladder will be hanging from the window of your room."

"Yes."

"At a signal from me you will climb down to the ground."

"I will."

"Little Cloud and I will be waiting for you at the foot of the ladder with our mustangs."

"Yes."

"We all three will immediately fly for my yacht now lying off Constantinople."

"I see."

"Once on board and you are saved."

"Saved!" echoed the young girl, in rapturous delight.

The poor girl could hardly believe her own ears.

"Yes, saved," said the Cowboy Duke with emphasis, for once on board my stanch and swift steam yacht the Texan Mustang, we will sail quickly away from these diggings, and your freedom will be won."

"How brave you boys must be," said Eugenie, in great awe at the daring plan of Lasso Louis.

"We've been there before, Miss Eugenie," put in Little Cloud.

"But this bold plan may be your death, dear friends."

The Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud smiled; how little did the innocent girl dream of the many dangers, escapes and terrible border experiences the two daring young Texas rangers had survived, ay, had passed through without a scratch!

How little could she understand that this daring plan of her escape, which she felt was fraught with the dangers of death, seemed but little more than a play-spell to the intrepid young border Texans.

As they stood thus in secret confab, soft footsteps sounded without.

"The Turkish guards!" whispered Eugenie; "I must away."

"Then, take this," and Lasso Louis drew one of his elegant gold-mounted self-cockers from his belt and slipped it into the hand of the young girl, with hurried directions as to its peculiar make and use.

"A revolver!" whispered Eugenie.

"Yes; and use it if necessary."

"I will!" said the young girl, bravely.

"And now farewell."

"Until to-night."

"Until to-night."

"The hour of midnight?"

"Yes, as the clock strikes twelve."

"Beware of the terrible Turkish guards!"

"Yes."

"Hush!"

"Some one comes?"

"Yes."

"Then away, ere we are discovered!"

And Eugenie slipped noiselessly away. And just in time, for, as she departed, two dark Turkish guards walked quickly in, and looked searchingly at the two young rangers.

"A close call, Louis," said Little Cloud.

"Rather, Cloudy."

"S'pose they'd seen the pop?"

"Then, there might have been a little Sullivan and Ryan knock-out."

Here Lasso Louis and Little Cloud started out for a walk about Constantinople, and to make perfect their bold plan of the poor slave girl's escape, and give certain orders to Lieutenant Lyons, of the Texan Mustang.

But if they had just had a "close call," the coming night would bring ones much closer, for the two young rangers were soon to find out that in tackling the silent Turkish guards of Arbiah Pasha, there was to be no play, but that the challenge meant war to the knife, a battle to the death, and that but for the rough teachings and Western border tricks of their adventurous Texan ranch life, death would soon have swooped down upon them, and the dying request of the old Ranger Duke remained unfulfilled forever!

CHAPTER VII.

MISSING.

"ALL quiet, Little Cloud?"

"Not a soul can I see!" came the answer, in cautious, whispered accents.

The scene was a dark, secluded spot, where the bright moonlight fell not at all, beneath the window of a sleeping apartment of Arbiah Pasha's villa, in the shadowy rose-gardens, and surrounded by tall, thick clumps of rose-bushes.

It was near the midnight hour, and the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud were about to attempt the secret rescue of Eugenie Chambertain, as planned in the foregoing chapter.

Lasso Louis was standing beneath the window, a small rope ladder, with two sharp iron hooks at one end, in one hand, and a fine silken lariat in the other.

Gazing upward for a moment, to take a gauge of the distance, the right arm of the Cowboy Duke jerked slightly in an upward direction, and "whiz!" went straight up in the air for about twenty-five feet, a coil of a silken lasso. It caught promptly at its destination, ringing firmly the blunt end of a limb of a tree that protruded out nearly against the window.

"Well may they call you 'Lasso Louis, King of the Silken Lariat!'" exclaimed Little Cloud, in admiration of the beautiful "sling" just made by his friend.

"There must be no bungling work now, Cloudy," replied Louis. "Every stroke must tell well. By the way, are your revolvers perfect?"

"All ready for business, Louis."

"That is well. There must be no failure to-night through our fault. The mustangs are standing, you say, behind that clump of bushes?"

"Yes, Louis, and all ready."

"Very well, then, I will secure the ladder to the window."

As he spoke, the Cowboy Duke grasped the dangling end of the fine strong lariat and ascended quickly, hand over hand, up its length. Reaching the window, which he had ascertained was that of the sleeping-room of Eugenie, he secured the sharp hooks of the rope ladder firmly into the sill, letting the disengaged end fall noiselessly down to the ground below. Then coiling his lariat he quickly descended it, and stood beside Little Cloud.

Presently, he withdrew from an inside pocket a beautiful gold watch, and looked at the time.

"Four minutes of twelve, Cloudy!"

"Time will soon be up for her appearance, Louis."

It was a strange tableau that presented itself; not so unusual in the ever eventful land of the far West, but here, in this drowsy, flowery, effeminate Eastern country, odd enough; down from the little window of the white villa hung the small rope ladder, significant enough in itself; near by crouched the two young Western rangers, clad in their picturesque half-Mexican, half-Texan garb, their broad sombreros pulled well down over their eyes, the dark-brown face of Little Cloud, eager, brave and expectant, the visage of the Cowboy Duke, stern, set, fearless and with the expression of strongest will and firm determination lining his handsome features; while near at hand, behind a clump of bushes, stood the two perfectly trained Indian mustangs of the rangers, silent, motionless, waiting the bidding of their masters. A strange scene here, with the Eastern moonlight and dark shadows lying about it, indeed!

"One minute of twelve, Cloudy!" whispered the Cowboy Duke, glancing again at his watch.

"She must appear at the window in a moment, Louis!" said Little Cloud, peering upward to the small, latticed window.

"Twelve o'clock!" spoke Louis, looking eagerly up, and expecting every moment to see the form of the young slave girl appear to view.

The seconds followed on, the clocks tolled the midnight hour, but no form showed itself at the casement! On flew the moments, and the young rangers waited, anxious, alarmed, and in vain!

"Twelve, fifteen!" exclaimed Lasso Louis, "and still no sign of her!"

"Something is wrong!" whispered Little Cloud.

"There is!" echoed the Cowboy Duke, now fully alarmed.

"What can it be?"

"Heaven knows!" said Louis.

"Danger!" whispered Little Cloud.

"God forbid any to her, Cloudy!" said Louis, reverently, gazing once more up to the dark, silent window.

"But, Louis, something terrible must have happened to her!"

"I will know!" spoke the Cowboy Duke, firmly, setting his teeth.

"What will you do, Louis?"

"Climb to the window!" replied Lasso Louis.

And seizing the rounds of the rope ladder, he carefully ascended toward the dark, closed casement. "Watch well below, Cloudy, and at the first sight or sound of danger, give me the signal!" he whispered down.

Reaching the window, the Cowboy Duke opened the casement softly and noiselessly. The window was too high up to be securely fastened and yielded promptly to Louis's hand.

He stepped quietly into the room, after listening for a moment. All was still and dark, except where the golden patches of moonlight flickered upon the floor. Striking a small Turkish wax taper, he peered sharply about him. Not a living soul was to be seen, and the snowy, white bed was unruffled!

"Gone!" muttered Lasso Louis, still glaring wildly about him, his stout heart sinking.

Suddenly, his keen eyes became riveted upon a slip of white paper lying upon the coverlet of the bed. He seized it, and was about to devour its contents, when a low whistle reached his ears from Little Cloud below.

"Danger!" he muttered, and leaped, tiger-like, to the window behind him. There below, was Little Cloud, with a revolver in each hand glistening in the moonlight that now had raised over the shadowy spot, and beckoning Lasso Louis to come down, with wild motions.

In a minute the agile and iron-muscled Lasso Louis dropped lightly upon the soft turf below.

"What, Cloudy!"

"Look there!"

The Cowboy Duke gazed quickly in the direction indicated. Crouching near at hand, in the dark shadow of a cluster of bushes, were a dozen sworded young Turkish guards, making their way slowly and silently, their long hooked sabers flashing in the moonlight, toward the spot where the two young rangers stood. They were about to swoop down upon the boys, evidently thinking they did not see them.

"Eugenie is missing!" hurriedly whispered Lasso Louis; "she has left a note, but quick! to the mustangs, ere the guards are upon us!"

Instantly the boys dashed through the thick row of bushes and bounded to the spot where their mustangs stood, springing upon their backs in a flash.

They had hardly done so, when the young Turkish guard, noting the action, burst upon the rangers, their long sabers clanking and clashing madly about their mustangs, like a hungry pack of wolves.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOILED!

TOWARD the hour of noon of that same day two men had been seated in a latticed window of Arbiah Pasha's villa, smoking leisurely their rose-water narghiles, and gazing out upon the boat-dotted waters of the sunlit Bosphorus.

One was Arbiah Pasha, himself, the other, an apparent strange visitor, for it was plain from the formal manner both assumed that they were nearly strangers to each other.

The visitor was to all appearance, a Turkish gentleman of wealth and leisure. He was most elegantly attired in Turkish satin, of gold and crimson hues, and wore upon his dark head a small, red silk fez, or cap, set in a jaunty way to one side. He was very handsome for a Turk, with a dark, rather sarcastic and sinister face, and had a polished, easy manner about him that smacked more of the French courtier than the sluggish Turkish citizen.

And, indeed, there was much more of the French gentleman about this elegant personage than the Turkish, for you, reader, have no doubt already seen through his splendid Oriental disguise—the rich silken garb, the dark, sallow stain on the handsome face, and recognized beneath all this fine, subtle deception, the true person—the French nobleman anarchist—the South-western road-agent, Count Rudolph, the Renegade, the "White Apache," brother-in-crime of the fallen War Cloud!

While the dying Ranger Duke had been hoarsely whispering his last request to Lasso Louis that fatal midnight of some weeks past, there had been one listener besides the sorrowful son, stretched flat out upon the ground, in the black shadow of the half-burned outbuilding—the Snake Ranchero, as the Apache half-breed had been ever called after his treacherous attempt to knife the honest Night-Ranchman Joe. He had been ordered to watch by the Ranger Duke until the return of Lasso Louis, and when that young gentleman came riding up with the treasured iron casket, he had shrunk back in a black shadow and listened to the dying request to the Cowboy Duke, prompted to do so by the sheer instinct of his snake's nature.

Being in dead enmity against Louis and long a secret admirer of the dashing renegade and an aspirant to a position amidst the ranks of his lawless band of Apaches, and also seeing that terrible night that there was some fierce enmity between him and the Ranger Duke, he had, later, on hearing by some chance that the Renegade Count was not really dead, sent the secret he had heard to him in a message.

This news was, of course, received with greatest satisfaction by the renegade, and as his reward, the Snake Ranchero was made one of his right-hand rascals.

The renegade at once decided to follow Louis, who had left the West but a little before, overtake him, delay him and Little Cloud by fair means or foul, and himself find the lost heiress and turn her to some good account to himself. Having failed to rob the Ranger Duke of his papers, by which he, having by some Paris correspondence learned of that gentleman's awaiting inheritance, had proposed to palm himself off in France as the real Duke de Chambertain, as the Ranger Duke had rightly suspected, he

jumped eagerly at this new deviltry to gather riches unto himself, although already made quite rich by his years of successful outlawry. Knowing the Snake Ranchero would make him a useful tool, he had taken him along.

He felt quite sure of success, for he really had one important advantage over the Cowboy Duke. He had seen Eugenie many times in her childhood, when he had had, under false colors, a short acquaintance with her misled father, James Chambertain, and had often noticed, with his cunning eyes, a slight scar over her right eye, so felt positive he could recognize her at once. He even felt, since he would know her so well, that she might also chance to recognize him, for, on account of a certain instinctive childish aversion she had evinced for him, he knew he had long remained in her memory. But this, of course, really appeared extravagant. Not overtaking Lasso Louis, he had followed him to Constantinople in a stanch yacht obtained at Marseilles, accompanied by the Snake Ranchero. This latter gentleman was duly installed in an obscure hotel; his master, who, in the mean time, learning by some happy circumstances, the like of which often turn up to favor the worst villain, that the French consul at Constantinople had once been a political friend of his, had procured a fraudulent letter of introduction from him to Arbiah Pasha. He had presented himself, during the absence of Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, to the old Turk in the guise of a country Turkish gentleman, and, being really a clever linguist and a most accomplished rascal, he had hardly any difficulty in playing his bold role.

He had been secretly and constantly dogging Lasso Louis and Little Cloud at the villa on the Bosphorus, and it had really been his fiendish visage they had dimly seen appearing and disappearing so mysteriously in the dark clump of rose-bushes the night of their arrival. He had then heard all their plans, prospects, etc., as to the young slave girl, Zara, how she was likely in the possession of Arbiah Pasha, had got the probable description of her, and at once realized that he must act quickly or lose the game he had now decided to play, namely, that of getting Eugenie Chambertain into his own hands before she could be rescued by Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, spirit her away somewhere, make her become his wife, and thus ultimately gain her immense fortune that he knew the Cowboy Duke was endeavoring to restore to her.

And again he had reason to congratulate himself upon one more miraculous escape from death from the revolver of Lasso Louis; he had timely caught the flash of the silver self-cocker as Louis had slowly withdrawn it from his belt, and dropping almost instantly into an old dried-up, vine-covered well, he had noticed a few feet away some minutes before with great satisfaction, he had saved his life again, and, indeed, by a hair's breadth!

Arbiah Pasha had at once become pleased with his suave and elegant-mannered visitor, and at a flattering request from the handsome Turk, had shown him with pleasure about the fine villa. When in the slave's quarters the Renegade Count had soon, by a little adroit questioning and slick detective work, distinguished from the rest, and recognized to his satisfaction, by the little scar that still showed slightly, the girl Zara, and had carelessly admired her intelligent appearance, but nothing more, knowing enough to be prudent, and being highly gratified at the fact of discovering his prize in such good time. He had now decided to try and purchase her at once if it cost him his whole fortune, which was far from being small.

He now smoked coolly in the stern presence of the old Turk and played his points, like the accomplished and subtle arch villain he was, realizing that if he triumphed over the brave and shrewd Cowboy Duke, it must be by the finest scheming only, by playing such a game as he had never played before.

"And so you need a slave or two, and would like to purchase the girl Zara?" Arbiah Pasha was saying.

"Just so," replied the Renegade Count, puffing away composedly at his pipe and blowing huge smoke clouds of Turkish tobacco through the lattice, while he spoke with the tone and air of a true country Turkish gentleman, as he represented himself to be. "Ye," continued the Count Rudolph, "I am in sore need of a slave to place at the head of my household, and particularly require an intelligent one. Believing the girl Zara to be unusually brilliant, I am very desirous to be her owner; and let me say that I would not stop at the price if you will sell her to me."

Here Arbiah Pasha smoked silently at his pipe for some moments and seemed to be thinking earnestly.

Now, the old Turk was really shrewd and cunning in his way; he was giving the rather liberal proposition of his visitor due consideration; he had noticed at the time of their publications, the advertisements relating to the lost Eugenie Chambertain with some satisfaction, for he had for some time realized that his slave girl Zara was not of the common herd, that there was something decidedly foreign about her, and on quiet investigation that there was a strong probability that the lost child of the advertisement and she were the same. He then also remembered that years before, when he had purchased her, the Arab slave-dealer, who he well knew was none too reputable, had seemed over-anxious to get rid of her, and thinking it all over, he had become quite convinced that he could reply to the advertisement favorably, and finally obtain for her private deliverance a large sum of gold.

But even now, after the arrival of Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, he credited the chances against him, realized that after all there could easily be a mistake, and that the slave, Zara, might be but a slave and no more. Another most momentous idea now occurred to him: if she really was the long-lost Eugenie Chambertain, and Lasso Louis could so prove, a legal course would deliver the young girl to the young ranger, demanding not a dollar for her deliverance, in which case Arbiah Pasha would come far wide of his fostered aim, and possibly get himself into trouble for holding a foreign girl in captivity all these long years of her young life. His reputation was not an enviable one about Constantinople, his fortunes were nearly fallen from long prodigality, and he felt that he would surely be a sorry fool to let go a certainty for an uncertainty, for undoubtedly here was a liberal purchaser whom kind chance had thrown in his way, and from whom he might extract a fine sum, and also dispose of ticklish property under the best of circumstances, as the prospective purchaser would take her to his household which lay afar off, and thus rid him safely forever of what might prove an unhealthy responsibility. When the time came he would ask the Cowboy Duke to look over his slaves, and not finding his cousin among them, the matter could end in apologies and an acknowledged mistake.

Yes, the cunning old Turk would take the bird in the hand.

"Indeed," replied the old fellow to the elegant Turk. "Well," he continued, leisurely smoking away, "I am not so very anxious to dispose of her; however, a good figure is not to be thrown over the shoulder very often," and he winked knowingly.

The Renegade Count felt himself grow intoxicated with the delight of a success he saw almost at hand.

"How much, then, for the slave girl, Zara?" asked he, trying hard to control his excitement.

The shrewd old Turk meditated a moment, then replied:

"What will you give?"

The renegade saw it was to be a case of diamond cut diamond, and so at once decided to start the figure low.

"Two thousand dollars," he replied.

The old Turk laughed.

"Why, I would not take five thousand for her."

"Ten thousand!" spoke the renegade, deeming it wise to make the raise and thus stagger Arbiah Pasha.

But Arbiah did not stagger.

"No, my friend, I could not take twenty thousand for that smart miss," he answered, getting the figure up as quickly as possible, feeling sure, from the evident eagerness of the count, that he was bound to buy anyway.

"Thirty thousand!" cried the excited renegade, positive now that he was bidding against some large offer that must have been made by the Cowboy Duke, and that he must better it or lose, however high it was.

Arbiah Pasha, on his part, concluded that his wealthy visitor must have fallen in love with the beautiful and brilliant slave, and wished to purchase her to make her his wife, or, that he had seen the late advertisement and wished to speculate. He would, anyway, set an exorbitant price and see if it would be accepted.

"Nothing less, sir, than seventy-five thousand dollars!" spoke the old Turk coolly and conclusively. He would try this enormous figure, and if it failed he would come down.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars?"

"Nothing less."

"That is too much."

"Not if you want to buy!" replied the other, meaningly.

"That is your decided figure?"

"It is."

The crafty renegade count maintained a few moments' silence. Could it be that the old Turk thought him buying in the interest of Lasso Louis? Had the rich young ranger offered a similar figure? However it was, Arbiah Pasha stood firmly at the enormous amount. It would be a crippling price to the renegade; what was he to do? The old Turk, he knew, now, on account of the Ranger Duke's advertisements, of course held the girl high; the Cowboy Duke, too, must have offered almost as much.

In a few moments he decided that there was but one thing to do: he must pay the great figure or lose all. By paying it, he felt sure he was winning ten times as much, for he was now well aware that Eugenie Chambertain would one day be more than a million-dollar heiress. After all, it would be a cheap bargain.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars?" repeated the renegade.

"Exactly," replied Arbiah Pasha, maintaining a fine nonchalance, although he was really at fever-heat beneath his cool exterior, for here, no doubt, was a fine fortune nearly in his needy hands.

"Done!" exclaimed the count, and, well prepared for the occasion, he tossed two huge pouches of gold and a bundle of bank-notes into the smoking-gown of Arbiah Pasha.

"Do you take her away to-day?" asked the old Turk, in a smothered ecstasy over the vast amount of new bank-notes and yellow gold he now held closely to him.

"This very morning," replied the renegade, he too, in a state of infinite delight, now that he was the owner of the slave-girl Zara, Eugenie Chambertain, the wealthy heiress. "I will take her at once to my country villa on the coast of the Black Sea," he continued, lying like the dastard villain he was; "my yacht, now lying in port, will sail at once."

"Very good," said Arbiah Pasha, and, excusing himself, he repaired to his household to give orders relative to the immediate departure of the purchased Zara, leaving the triumphant Renegade Count smoking on composedly at the cool window.

But could the old Turk have now seen the face of his liberal purchaser, he would hardly have recognized in him the elegant Turkish gentleman of a few minutes before; his dark, stained countenance was now horribly distorted with a demoniac smile, and a terrible expression of fiendish triumph overspread his sinister features, while he muttered in a fierce whisper, not unlike the hissing of a snake:

"Foiled! Ha! ha! ha! noble Cowboy Duke, you are no match for Rudolph, the Renegade Count! She is now mine, though it has almost beggared me; but her great fortune shall swell my now almost empty pockets, for my wife she shall be ere a dozen moons, as my darling Apaches would say; and so I, as her loving husband, will be once more the wealthy and dashing Count Rudolph! Then, the old life of power and pleasure in France! I must spirit her away to some lonely coast of the Black Sea, keep her in captivity there until I make her love me and promise to be my wife. Then I will bring her forward and let her claim the immense estates in waiting for her. If she does not chance to admire my fine physog and fall in love with me, why— Well, Rudolph the Renegade Count always had more than one way of getting through the woods of the Texan border, and I guess he will find as many ways here in the land of roses, for my wife Eugenie Chambertain must be, and her fortune shall be mine!"

And could the poor girl have heard the hissing mutterings and seen the dark, mocking face in all its diabolical triumph and determination, her young, innocent blood would have nigh frozen in her veins!

CHAPTER IX.

THE RENEGADE COUNT UNMASKED.

THE news of the slave girl Zara's sudden sale soon spread through the slaves' quarter of Arbiah Pasha's villa, and was received with great regret and many sorrowful exclamations from the surprised slaves, with whom she had ever been a favorite.

The news reached Eugenie, as we will now call her, where she was resting from her morning duties, and in happy contemplation of her prospective rescue from bondage by her brave and handsome cousin, the Cowboy Duke. She was gazing dreamily out through a window into the cool, odoriferous, shadowy rose-gardens swarming with singing, golden-hued birds, and

breathing in the refreshing, rose-scented morning air.

Suddenly, one of her favorite companions came rushing up to her, exclaiming in sorrowful abandon:

"Zara, Zara! the master has sold you!"

"Sold me?" gasped Eugenie, her dark eyes dilating with frightened surprise, and half-fainting.

"Sold you just now!" answered her friend, the tears coming to her eyes.

"Who to?"

"To a wealthy Turkish gentleman from the country."

"When am I to be taken away?" asked Eugenie, hastily.

"To-day."

"To-day?"

"Yes, this very afternoon. The master, Arbiah Pasha, has just given orders to the guard Mojek to prepare for your departure."

"Merciful heavens! then I am lost!" gasped the poor girl, under her breath. "Where do they take me?" she asked, as calmly as she could.

"Far away, somewhere on the Mediterranean Coast."

"Lost! Lost!" sobbed Eugenie, for she felt that now all the dear hopes of only a few moments before were gone forever. She would be taken off at once, she thought, and the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud would not know of her departure, and would not be liable to find track of her, until too late, for the boys had told her on ending their happy interview in the morning in the breakfast room, that they were going out for the afternoon, and, possibly, the evening, for a walk about the city, and to prepare fully for her escape.

For the sake of the safety of the brave boys she would not dare to leave any word with her slave companions, for she knew it would not be really wise to trust them with so momentous a secret as her own, although many of them were her friends.

But what was she to do? What warning could she leave that would not betray anything? Some clew she must leave behind.

Suddenly, a bold, but apparently practicable idea came to her; she would fly up to her sleeping apartment, and from whence the Cowboy Duke was to rescue her that night, and, trusting no one but he would find it, leave a note, containing such information of her sudden departure as best she could give, enjoining him, should he deem it wise, to follow up such clew as it would furnish. She could write quite fairly in English, and pencil and paper were near about.

This seemed the only feasible plan. Something of the kind must be done, too, for with her shrewd young brain, she readily understood, now that she had had much explained to her by the Cowboy Duke, that Arbiah Pasha, for some sudden and dark reason of his own, preferred to dispose of her otherwise than by his original intentions and would, of course, keep secret henceforth about her, and, most probably, deny her existence, explaining that he had simply been mistaken in the matter of identity.

She considered the plan a moment, then hastily withdrew from the apartment, and flew noiselessly up to her sleeping-room.

Here she hastily penciled, as explanatory as possible, a note to the Cowboy Duke. Finished, she laid it in as conspicuous a place as she could find and departed, the whole action apparently unnoticed by any one, and trusting to Providence that her cousin might find it and follow its clew.

She felt, on deliberation, that, anyway, such strong, brave youths as she plainly saw Lasso Louis and Little Cloud were, would not rest until they had found some clew of her, and that they would, no doubt, follow her to the earth's ends, but what they would effect ultimately her rescue or deliverance from bondage. To their brave hearts and shrewd heads and strong hands she must and would trust, and so took heart in her sudden dire misfortune.

Shortly the brown, fierce guards approached her, and she was hurried roughly away to the Black Raven, as the yacht of the Renegade Count was named.

Later on, the Black Raven wound slowly out of the crowded port of the Golden Horn and eastward down the Bosphorus; and spreading out her broad, white wings and puffing out her black smoke, shot quickly on down toward the Marmora Sea, fleeing on faster and faster toward the broad sea opening before her, sneaking away quietly and quickly, like the dark, evil thing she was.

Leaning calmly over the rail and puffing a scented Turkish cigarette, was the elegant

Turkish visitor of Arbiah Pasha, the now triumphant and delighted Renegade Count, watching with a pleasant smile over his dark, evil features, the fast disappearing white minarets of Constantinople, and near by lounged the Snake Ranchero.

"Ha! ha!" he was musing to himself. "Well, I have stolen the march neatly upon the Cowboy Duke, and before he can hunt up any definite clew, I and my fair purchase will be far, far away. He and Little Cloud cannot dream of my being here in the East, and at the disappearance of Eugenie—have they discovered her—will be completely mystified, and further proceedings on their part necessarily stopped. There is no doubt but what the old Turk will conduct himself properly, however matters are, for it strikes me that it will be to his interest to keep all his knowledge of his slave-girl Zara under the rose. He has had some good reason for disposing of her thus to me, and will now be satisfied to let the whole matter find oblivion as soon as possible, which will suit me to a T, and save me the trouble of particularly covering my tracks."

"And now all I have to do is to bring my slick little game to a close somewhere down on the Mediterranean or Adriatic Coast and reap my reward for my fine work. I will continue on in this disguise, and, as Eugenie's wealthy Turkish master, will win her love and promise of marriage, which proceeding she cannot but consider flattering, and so look upon it with favor. And now I must present myself to the fair Eugenie and see what sort of a partner I have to play with."

Meanwhile, down in a small, pretty furnished cabin that had been set aside for especial service, was Eugenie, sitting in a thoughtful attitude and meditating upon the strange events that had come into her life so suddenly and had followed each other in such quick succession.

And she did not feel so very downhearted, for somehow, now, she felt her rescue from her fate would, after all, be only a matter of time. She thought of the strong, handsome form of the Cowboy Duke and saw in her mind his brave and determined face as it looked in the morning when he had told her she must be rescued that night, and she placed herself in his hands, as it were, with full confidence that he would soon work her rescue from the life of wrong and bondage that was imposed upon her.

She, too, would appeal to her new master to free her on the explanations she would give, but here her hopes grew cold, for she almost knew she could no more hope for her deliverance from this new master than from Arbiah Pasha, for even if he believed her story, he would only set a higher value upon her. She could only hope that the brave Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud would come to her rescue or, that finally, she might find a chance to escape from bondage herself. But she was really a brave and sensible young girl and had strongest confidence in the two young rangers, for they had, in their hurried explanations, to tell her something of the wild, dangerous life they had been accustomed to on the great Western border, of the terrible massacre at the Chambertain Ranch, mentioning the killing of the great War Cloud by Lasso Louis, his pursuit of his fiendish enemy, the Renegade Count, and his probable death from the falling of his horse from under him by Louis; and all this had made her look upon the Cowboy Duke as one to whom her rescue was far from impossible. She trusted that Lasso Louis would find her note, and lose no time in following quickly in pursuit of the Black Raven from the clew she had given therein.

As she revolved all this in her mind, a soft knock sounded upon her cabin door, and the Renegade Count entered her presence, with much show of ceremony and grace, and addressed her in soft, flattering Turkish.

"Beg pardon, Miss Zara, but I thought I would call and pay a short visit to her who is so soon to take charge of my household."

As the Renegade Count spoke, the brilliant black eyes of Eugenie Chambertain, glancing up as he entered, seeing him for the first time, became suddenly riveted upon his dark, stained face, and so piercing was her gaze that the renegade fairly reddened beneath the brown coloring of his disguise. Where had she seen that face before? It seemed to carry her back to the days of her childhood in far-off America. But only for the moment did the dark face hold out the familiar look; then it vanished, like some imperfect, fleeting memory of years long past and dead, and nothing could she see in the seeming Turkish gentleman but that elegant personage, although she still felt much surprise at the very affable attitude he assumed.

And he? At the sudden, piercing glare from the flashing black orbs of the young maiden, his black heart almost stood still. Could she have recognized him? No, utterly impossible. Many long years had come and gone since she had seen his face on the Texan plains in her early childhood, and such a stretch of memory would be the wildest extravaganza.

But the Renegade Count, crafty as he was, forgot one thing: that, though in most cases he would be correct, his face once seen, might be forgotten, but never wholly obliterated from the memory, for such was the strange, demon-like visage of Count Rudolph that it would stamp itself indelibly upon the weakest memory.

However, in this fine disguise, with nothing save the faint, almost lost memory of Eugenie of him, he would have been really safe from any recognition from the shrewd maiden before him, had it not been for that strange, unaccountable instinct that is ever lying as a body-guard in the breast of young and innocent womanhood to warn her of danger that threatens and to enable her to scent the villain in her path, and which latent gift now almost unconsciously, caused strange and seemingly impossible suspicions and fears to enter into her brain.

And all the while, as the Renegade Count talked on in easy and most courteous conversation, Eugenie's mind would keep wandering back to the time of her childhood in America, with misty recollections crowding in upon it, and amid them arose, like a Phenix, the dark, evil face of the Renegade Count, not as a Turkish gentleman, but as a fierce, sombreroed, revolver-belted outlaw of the Texan border, as she had seen him in the days of her childhood. And as these vision-like memories dawned upon her, as the gray, misty dawn breaks in upon the shadowy last hours of the night, the sallow face of the man before her slowly and involuntarily associated itself with the dread enemy of her cousin, Louis, the Renegade Count of whom he had mentioned considerable to her, and some of whose dastard deeds, with his fiendish description, he had narrated to her. Slowly at first, then faster and faster did this strange association grow into an idea, wild though startling, until at last, the threads of scattered memories drew themselves together in one mad rush, and a fierce, blinding light broke over Eugenie Chambertain that made her heart almost cease to throb, and her blood clot and stiffen through her veins! And that light was the strong and most convincing belief that the elegant, Mephistophelean Turk before her, and the terrible, murderous enemy of her cousin, Louis, the Renegade Count, were one and the same!

As Count Rudolph was talking on the prospective duties to be assigned her, and in so doing putting forth his subtlest efforts to ingratiate himself into her good graces, he suddenly glanced at her to find once more that her flashing, onyx orbs were fixed upon him in a most startling manner, and that there was a new, strange look upon the girl's face.

Indeed, Eugenie appeared now more like an experienced, stern young woman than the innocent maiden she was, for upon her naturally shrewd and brilliant face was a striking expression of determination and fearlessness, and her hands were clinched tight together: and looking still keenly into the face of him before her, she spoke, in cold, mocking, fearless tones:

"So you, sir, are my new master?"

"Such is my honor, Miss Zara," replied the count, with a sweeping bow.

"And you are a country Turkish gentleman?"

"Another honor I can acknowledge, Miss Zara," answered the villain, wondering and quickly alarmed within himself at the strange attitude taken by Eugenie, and growing pale beneath his sallow stain.

"And I am your slave?"

"Still another honor," replied the renegade, now growing more alarmed and bewildered.

Here, Eugenie rose from her couch, and standing erect and firm, and pointing her finger at the now electrified wretch before her, spoke now in plain English, her face that of a bold, and determined woman, her voice ringing through the cabin in accents strong, fearless and piercing.

"Then, sir, you lie! You are no Turkish gentleman and I am, by rights, no slave! I am, as you well know, Eugenie Chambertain, the daughter and heiress of your once friend, Jam's Chambertain, and you are now carrying me off for some vile design! and you!—you are the nobleman socialist, Count Rudolph Fontbelleuve, alias the sworn enemy of my cousin, the Cowboy Duke; the Renegade Count, murderer and outlaw of the Texan border!"

CHAPTER X.

LIFE AND DEATH CLASP HANDS.

WHEN Lasso Louis and Little Cloud had returned from their business at Constantinople, it had been hard on to the midnight hour by their intent. They had entered the gardens of the villa by a private entrance and rode quietly, and as they thought, secretly to the scene of Eugenie's rescue. But a young Turkish night-guard had chanced to remark their strange movements, and as they stationed their horses behind the screening clumps of bushes and commenced the bold operation of, as they thought, Eugenie's rescue, he had hurried to the guards' quarters in the villa, and, with eleven others, returned to watch the proceedings of the young bordermen. At once satisfied that some mischief was afoot, the guard had made ready to surprise the rangers, just as Little Cloud, seeing their approach, had given the signal to the Cowboy Duke.

Springing across their mustangs, as related, the boys waeled about and prepared to meet with their revolvers the charge. But the Cowboy Duke, realizing that this action could but result in a terrible slaughter, cried suddenly to Little Cloud:

"Separate! separate and don't shoot, Cloudy!" now deciding it wisest to cut and run for it than to charge upon the Turks, whom the young rangers could have soon dispatched with their revolvers, had they wished to dash into the fray in earnest. But the Cowboy Duke was a gentleman every inch of him and always avoided bloodshed, when it was possible to, though it often endangered his own life. He had no wish to take advantage of the Turkish guards, who he knew were only doing their duty, and proposed to escape an actual encounter by Little Cloud and he bolting in opposite directions and thus break the charge of the guards.

He realized, however, on giving the order to Little Cloud, that the ruse was hardly practicable, on account of the vast rose-forests which made a straight run absolutely impossible. The guards seeing the movement, also separated, eight bounding for the Cowboy Duke, and four hurling themselves after Little Cloud, surrounding each in a trice, for they had the one advantage of being on foot and so were able to make even quicker movements through the clumps of bushes than the mounted rangers.

They leaped about Lasso Louis, hacking fiercely at him with their long, deadly sabers, slashing terribly into the hide of Prairie Boy, while the hardy little mustang stood the charge like a young war charger, pawing down the Turks with great effect.

"Don't shoot, Cloudy!" cried again the Cowboy Duke, still hoping to avoid bloodshed; "club your rifle and beat through the charge!"

Clubbing his own rifle, Lasso Louis charged precipitately upon the clamoring guards, felling them down like logs. It was now the one thing to do or sacrifice his own life, for the now maddened Turks clashed about him from all sides, and had already cut his corduroy coat in shreds upon his back, as the blood was flowing freely from many flesh wounds.

Right and left he swung his rifle, and the deadly right-arm sweep that had felled the mighty War Cloud, was now repeated in quick succession. Five guards were quickly stretched, stunned, upon the ground. The remaining three pounced upon the Cowboy Duke like fiends in human mold, making a slashing onslaught that they seemed bound should not end until Lasso Louis lay a mangled carcass beneath their feet.

Down upon him fell the flashing swords of the Turks, every clanking blow of which seemed to ring the death knell of the Cowboy Duke. But if he had fought like a young tiger in the terrible Apache massacre, he now fought like a dozen uncaged. Up and down, right and left swept his rifle-butt into the clamoring Turks, like the arm of some powerful machinery, while Prairie Boy bounded, charged, retreated and charged again, like the perfectly trained little broncho he was, and, indeed, at the timely spurs of Lasso Louis, saved the day for his master more than once.

Suddenly, two of the three remaining Turks dropped, felled to the sod, leaving but one young giant now to push the battle, while away flew the rifle of Lasso Louis, broken square in two by the last thundering blow, out of his hands.

The powerful young Turk, seeing his advantage quick enough, hurled himself upon his antagonist with the force of a battering-ram, unseating the Cowboy Duke, and together they rolled far away upon the turf beneath the rose-bushes, Louis underneath, leaving Prairie Boy standing riderless and bleeding, alone.

Lasso Louis now realized that he must fight

as he had never fought before, and though weak from the loss of blood, he set his teeth hard, gathered all his remaining strength in a mighty effort and strove to do one thing—clutch the black throat of the brawny Turk. His iron muscles and hard Western training now stood him in the best stead they ever had. Thrusting up his two cut and bleeding hands, he clutched at the throat above him looking black and thick in the uncertain moonlight, and, seizing it in a deadly, dying grip, as it were, locked his wiry fingers about it and crunched it in a clutch that was like that of an iron vise, as the bony knee of the Turk upon his chest was fast pressing the breath from his body.

The old-fashioned grip told well. The tongue of the Turk protruded slowly from his gasping mouth, and then, with a low gurgle, he rolled over to the ground, half dead.

The Cowboy Duke, dazed and nigh exhausted, nevertheless sprung up and gave a low whistle for his horse. Prairie Boy came bounding up instantly, and, mounting the somewhat rested mustang, Lasso Louis dashed away to where he had last seen Little Cloud.

In a few moments he observed through an aisle of bushes his stanch friend, dismounted, fighting away upon the ground for dear life, he, too, with a single Turk, three of the guards stretched silent and motionless upon the grass, the mellow eastern moonlight lighting up the weird, fantastic picture.

As he came up within about twenty yards of the scene he saw with quickened pulse what looked to be the last moments of Little Cloud. Prostrate upon the ground Little Cloud was hurled by the Turk, a thick-set, powerful fellow, and over his bared head in the air hung for a second the saber of the guard.

The Cowboy Duke took no second look, but, digging his rowels deep into Prairie Boy, he plunged toward the scene, whipping out his coiled lariat and holding it aloft to hurl, when, instantly, down came the saber of the Turk; but, from a lurch from Little Cloud, its descent was broken and it only grazed the shoulder of its intended victim. Again the saber was quickly raised in the air and hung glittering in the moonlight over the head of Little Cloud, but before it could fall this time the powerful Turk went spinning over the ground, his saber flying high in the air from his hand. The lariat of the Cowboy Duke, though flung from a good distance, caught promptly about the neck of its object, and Prairie Boy, wheeling obediently to one side at a spur from Lasso Louis, the murderous guard felt himself snatched, as if by magic, from his position and jerked instantly a dozen feet away, lying stunned where he rolled.

"Again you have saved my life, Louis!" exclaimed Little Cloud, thankfully.

"Not a word, Cloudy!" spoke the Cowboy Duke; "and now, out of this, before the whole household of Arbiah Pasha is upon us. There! That is the tramp of feet now! Away, quick, or we are lost!"

It was the work of but a few moments for Little Cloud to snatch up his sombrero, and spring upon his mustang standing near.

Away ahead dashed the Cowboy Duke, followed closely by Little Cloud, both making for the public highway in front of the villa.

"To the roadway!" cried Lasso Louis, "and then for the city!"

In a few minutes they reached the low front wall skirting the gardens of the villa, and leaping over it, they broke away down the dark, shady avenue toward the city, just as a troop of guards, having heard the sound of the battle, headed by Arbiah Pasha himself, rushed upon the scene of the recent fray, and halted, thunder-struck, before the stunned bodies of the dozen prostrated Turks.

On galloped the two young rangers down the silent avenue, until they were a good distance from the villa; then they drew rein in a large patch of white moonlight, and the Cowboy Duke said:

"Now, Cloudy, for the note left by poor Eugenie!" And drawing the slip of white paper from his breast, he read the penciled lines that showed plain in the dazzling Eastern moonlight, and ran as below:

"TWO O'CLOCK, P. M.

"DEAR COUSIN LOUIS:—I write this to let you know as best I can how it is that I have to you so strangely disappeared. This morning I was sold most suddenly to a strange country Turkish gentleman, for, I have been told, a large amount of money, and am to start at once in my new owner's yacht, now lying in port, for somewhere along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. I am, of course, wild with grief, but can do nothing but submit to my fate. I can only hope in you and God for my deliverance, and pray that you may find this note,

and discover a definite clew to my future whereabouts, and be enabled to soon follow me, and save me from this terrible life of mine. And now farewell. God bless you and Little Cloud. Your affectionate cousin,
EUGENIE."

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Little Cloud, but all this seems very strange!"

The Cowboy Duke maintained a few moments' silence, then spoke in slow, harsh, meaningful tones:

"Not so very strange, Cloudy!"

"Why, Louis?" asked Little Cloud, looking into the face of Lasso Louis, which had grown deadly pale in the bright moonlight.

"Who do you think this strange Turkish gentleman is?" asked the Cowboy Duke, significantly.

Little Cloud thought for a moment, then cried, suddenly:

"Not the Renegade Count?"

"Yes, the Renegade Count!"

"Then it was his face in the rose-gardens that night?"

"No other's!"

"And he has followed us here to thwart your plans and play your commission into his own hands and interests!"

"That is his game and I would wager my life on it!"

"But how on earth has he got wind of all this? He must be the devil in human form!"

The Cowboy Duke did not reply for some moments. He seemed wrapt in deep meditation. With his shrewd, well-balanced brain he could see through the most intricate plot, and was now trying hard to discover by what means the Renegade had become aware of the great Eastern mystery. His conclusion arrived at was, that some one had overheard the dying request of his father upon the night of the Apache massacre, and from that one the renegade had obtained his information. And who could that one have been? He now remembered that on riding up to his wounded father that fatal night, he had noticed the Snake Ranchero, who he then understood had been stationed to watch his father, sink slowly away on his approach, as if to shirk his duty. Now, had not this treacherous and unprincipled half-breed hid near by in the dark shadows and listened to the request of his dying father, and, later on, through the play of some strange circumstance, imparted the fruits of his eavesdropping to the Renegade, for although the whole countryside about Chamberlain Ranch knew of Lasso Louis's visit to the East, none knew, save Little Cloud, the secret object of that visit. How well had the sharp young ranger guessed it!

Yes, there was no other way of solving the mystery. And hearing the decision, Little Cloud was of the same opinion.

"And now," spoke the Cowboy Duke, "it will be a game of life and death between us!" and his face grew hard and set in the moonlight.

"Shall we make for the yacht, Louis?" asked Little Cloud, wheeling about.

"Yes, away for the port! We must sail at once in the wake of the Renegade Count and follow him if need be to the very ends of the earth!"

Here the low rumbling tread of horses' hoofs reached the keen ears of the young rangers from behind.

"Mounted guards are after us!" exclaimed Little Cloud.

"Quick! away!" cried the Cowboy Duke, breaking into a headlong gallop down the tree-arched avenue, followed by Little Cloud.

They made directly for wharfs of the port, following a secluded route they had marked out during the day to follow that night, and that led them to an old dock where Lieutenant Lyons of the Texan Mustang was in secret waiting with a large flat-boat to convey the young rangers and their mustangs to the yacht that had been worked up near by.

On they flew, the mustangs leaping like hounds over the ground, while the tramp of hoofs from behind sounded nearer and nearer.

Arbiah Pasha, soon comprehending their plan of Eugenie's escape, though it had been interrupted, was, nevertheless, revengefully incensed toward the Cowboy Duke on observing his half-dead guards, and at once decided to pursue the young rangers and kill them, mounting a few of the guards who revived with some others and following on in their tracks, in hot pursuit.

They were now gaining fast upon the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud, for the mustangs were much weakened from their bleeding sabre-wounds, and were fast failing in their speed. A hundred yards in the rear they could see the white Arab steeds of the Turkish guards bound-

ing down upon them like phantom horsemen in the pale uncertain moonlight.

"Faster! faster!" cried Lasso Louis, "or we are done for!"

"We can't hold out, Louis! my mustang will drop in another quarter!" shouted Little Cloud, urging his poor little beast to the last spurt of remaining strength.

They now broke into a lonely, dark, tunnel-like stretch of the long avenue, with the snowy steed of Arbiah Pasha, who led the chase, but fifty yards behind.

The Cowboy Duke now saw that further flight was of no use. In a few more moments the Turks would pounce down upon them and he realized that, with the long odds that were against him and Little Cloud, as weak as they and the mustangs were from the great loss of blood, it would only end in their instant slaughter by the now frenzied guards. There was one thing to do that might save them, and reining in to Little Cloud, he cried:

"The Apache trick, Cloudy! quick! or we are gone!"

Quickly the young plainsmen brought their well-taught mustangs to a slow walk, and reining them in to one side of the road, instantly swung themselves over the saddles and down on the inside, flat against the bellies of their horses, Indian fashion, and thus, rode slowly along the side of the road.

On came the galloping Turks, like a troop of war cavalry. As they sighted the slowly moving, riderless mustangs, they wheeled about their horses in wild confusion and a deafening thunder of hoof-falls, showing fiercest anger and great consternation.

"Divide, you fools!" shouted Arbiah Pasha, half-mad with surprise and chagrin, "and search the roadside fields! The American devils have taken across country on foot!" And setting the example, he lifted his white thoroughbred over the roadside wall, and with half the mounted guards in his wake, dashed away over the moonlit fields, the remaining half of the Turkish riders bounding away in an opposite direction, leaving the apparently riderless mustangs still pacing side by side slowly along the dark avenue.

As the sound of the hoof-falls of the Turkish horses died away, the Cowboy Duke spoke, in half-laughing tones:

"Are you there, Cloudy?"

"What's left of me, Louis," replied Little Cloud, with a laugh, both springing back into their saddles.

"That move proved a beauty, eh?" said Lasso Louis, triumphantly.

"A new wrinkle over on this side, I take it," replied Little Cloud, flipping the perspiration from his dark brow.

"Simply saved our necks, Cloudy!"

"Yes, Louis; and Heaven and the ruse be praised!"

"Amen to that, Cloudy!" said the Cowboy Duke, wiping his blood-stained face. "And now, once more for the yacht. Lyons will be crazy with anxiety!"

"Yes, to the yacht, Louis, for I feel as though I had been chopped into boarding-house hash! and see, we are both bleeding like steers! The mustangs are pretty well carved, too, but they can take it easy now, I think, down to the Bosphorus."

"And the quicker away the better, Cloudy, for we must be off this very night for the Black Sea!"

Following down through many long avenues and dark winding streets, the young bordermen finally rode up to the old, deserted wharf where Lieutenant Lyons was to be in waiting.

"Ho, Lieutenant Lyons!" spoke in low tones the Cowboy Duke.

"Ay, ay, Lasso Louis, Texan Mustang!" came back the answer promptly, and Lieutenant Lyons and a number of the Texan Mustang's crew appeared upon the deck of the flat-boat and brought it closely alongside the low dock, Lasso Louis and Little Cloud riding on board at once.

"But the maiden?" exclaimed Lieutenant Lyons, quickly noticing the absence of Eugenie, whom he knew, of course, the young rangers were to rescue that night; "and, great Heaven! you boys and the mustangs are bleeding like butchers!"

Then Lasso Louis and Little Cloud explained everything, in hurried tones, while Lieutenant Lyons and the sailors listened in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Holy Jupiter!" ejaculated Lieutenant Lyons, when the boys had finished, "but you chaps came altogether too near Davy Jones's little locker for comfort!"

The sailors were too astonished at the reckless, *debonair* young rangers to hardly find voice to say anything, save to exclaim and ejaculate among themselves.

"Oh, yes, I must acknowledge, a good bit of exercise, lieutenant," laughed the Cowboy Duke. "Nothing like a little Turkish spice with their figs and fruit cake!" added Little Cloud, jocularly.

"And now for the chase! eh, Mr. Chamberlain?" asked Lieutenant Lyons.

"Indeed!" said Lasso Louis. "Off, row, at once! Pull away, men! quick! to the Texan Mustang!"

Just as the first rose and-gray flush of dawn bathed the tall white domes and steeples of Constantinople, and the filmy, veil-like mists were rising up from the smooth, glancing waters of the silent Bosphorus, a long, trim ocean yacht steamed quickly away over the silver ripples, and spreading its white canvas pinions to the cool brisk morning breeze, shot out toward the blue broad mouth of the Sea of Marmora.

It was the Texan Mustang breaking into full chase after the Black Raven.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLACK RAVEN'S ESCAPE.

In hurling out her bold accusation at the Renegade Count, Eugenie Chamberlain really felt that it was a somewhat wild and uncertain stroke, and within herself proposed to decide the great question that weighed upon her brain, to a certain extent, by its effect upon the man before her. But her suspicions were soon confirmed.

As the startling words of Eugenie smote upon his ears, crafty and cunning adventurer as he thought himself, he stood before her self-accused self-convicted. The charge was so truthful, so correct in its detail and, bursting upon him so suddenly as it did, it completely dumfounded, ay, paralyzed, as it were, the renegade. For a few moments he stood like a man petrified to stone; then, recovering himself, he spoke, and in harsh, gruff tones, his manner that desperate, dogged attitude of the unmasked villain:

"Well, since it has been your pleasure to discover my true identity, why enjoy yourself in the possession of your soothing knowledge! I see the Cowboy Duke has put a flea in your pinky ear some way, but let me tell you, Mademoiselle Eugenie, that your information will be of no avail to you, for I shall accomplish my game just the same as the Renegade Count, as well as the country Turkish gentleman!"

"And, pray, what is your game?" asked Eugenie, coolly.

"Hal ha!" laughed the renegade; "you ask as though you had a right to know! Well," he continued, sarcastically, "since it don't make much difference now, I might as well add to your delightful stock of information. My 'game' is just this small bit of an idea: I am going to make you my wife in the shortest order possible—"

"And, as my lord and master, get your villainous hands upon the vast property that you know my cousin, Lasso Louis, has journeyed East to restore to me!" interrupted Eugenie now growing bold and fearless, like the really brave American girl she was.

"Exactly!" sneered the imperturbable outlaw count.

"Well, I must say you are *very* modest in your desires!" said Eugenie; "and," she continued, with piercing satire, compelled to actually laugh at the brassy cheek of the villain, "allow me to remark that I am really overjoyed at the prospect of possessing such a delightful husband!"

"Your sarcasm may be very relieving," replied the renegade, in grinding tones, "but your husband I shall be, whether a 'delightful' one or not!"

"M., your wife?"

"I have spoken!"

"Never! you villain!" retorted Eugenie, her brilliant black eyes flashing like those of an angered tigress.

"Let me repeat the ancient saw that, 'Talk is cheap!' " flung back the renegade.

"I would kill myself first!" cried Eugenie, her cheeks blazing red, and thinking of the gold-mounted revolver of Lasso Louis, still secreted in her breast safe from sight.

"A few weeks in this cabin, with the rich delicacy of bread and water will change your tune!" retorted the renegade.

"By that time, sir, my cousin, Lasso Louis, will have somewhat exploded your beautiful drama!"

"Hal! you depend upon your darling, dandy Cowboy Duke, eh? Well, let me put a flea in your ear, and say that before your darling ranger sport can get a definite clew of my movements, you will be as dead to him and the world as though you lay cold and stiff in your grave!"

And with this parting thrust, the Renegade Count walked from the cabin and shut the door with a bang that sent a tremor through the yacht.

The Renegade Count had now completed his plan of action as follows:

He would follow up the coast of the Mediterranean to the Adriatic Sea and then along the wild, lonely coast to Montenegro, a small, mountainous country, north of Turkey, thinly settled by a rough, warlike people called Montenegrins.

Here, in this seclusion, along the dreary Montenegro coast or upon the shore, as it pleased him, he would linger until Eugenie Chamberlain suc-

cumbed to her harsh captivity and agreed to become his wife. He had manned his yacht, the Black Raven, with a mixed villainous crew, who understood his plans and would consent to most anything for frequent rounds of grog and the prospect of good pay. He had had the yacht well provisioned, the crew well armed, and thus fitted out and commanding himself, being something of a sailor, steamed along to that end, keeping day and night a constant lookout in the rear for any signs of a pursuit from the Texan Mustang.

No signs appeared for many days, however, and feeling himself lost to the Cowboy Duke and now safe from pursuit, the Black Raven bowed merrily along toward the Adriatic Sea, its unsavory crew well filled with bad grog, happy and dafiful, and the Renegade Captain looking forward with great pleasure to a triumphant victory over his fair captive, Eugenie Chamberlain.

But one dark, stormy morning, as the Renegade Captain was smoking on deck in peaceful contemplation of his plans, the day lookout in the stern-rigging, who was none other than the Snake Ranchero, who had once been a sailor-before-mast on a California coast trader, shouted down from his high in startled tones;

"Sail ho! captain!"

"Whereaway, Snake?" shouted back the Renegade Captain.

"Nearly dead behind, sir, steaming up in our wake a point or two off the larboard stern!"

"What does she look?" asked the renegade.

"A trim-built steam yacht of the pleasure sort, sir, but well armed, and manned by Turks!"

The Renegade Count jumped instantly into the stern rigging, seized his glass from his Turkish jacket-pocket, and gazed hard in the rear of the Black Raven.

"Ay, ay, Snake! a pleasure-yacht, steaming up to us without her canvas! She gains, too, fast upon us!"

The renegade continued to stare hard at the oncoming yacht, showing now quite plainly in the gray mists of the stormy moon.

Suddenly, the Renegade Captain leaped higher in the rigging, and gazed hard through his glass for a moment. Then, his voice sounding like a madman's, he yelled:

"The Texan Mustang, by all the devils!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" shouted the Snake Ranchero, who had had the yacht of the Cowboy Duke pointed out to him by the renegade in the port of Constantinople. "It is the steam yacht of Lasso Louis!"

In another minute the Black Raven was all hum and buzz; the engines were forced to do their level best, every ray of canvas stretched, and a desperate fight was being made, while the Renegade Captain yelled out his commands in the voice of a demon let loose, as he saw the yacht steadily gaining upon him.

And, in deed, it was the Texan Mustang, plowing up in full chase, all her canvas bulging out before the stiff breeze, and her steam-pipes puffing out wreaths of black smoke like furnaces. The Cowboy Duke had followed such clew as Eugenie's note had given him, with his crew reinforced by an extra crew of Turkish sailors and a captain, who knew the coast and country well, for days had been bearing unsuccessfully along the Turkish shores; but after inquiring of many Mediterranean coasters, with great and most disuraging trouble, he had, finally, got upon the track of the Black Raven, and keeping up daily high-pressure steam, while the Renegade Count had taken it easy, imagining himself secure, had at last sighted her low, black hull, just as she was breaking into the waters of the Adriatic Sea.

Lieutenant Lyons, the wide-awake commander of the Texan Mustang, had noticed, though of course he had known her not, a rakish-looking steam yacht leave the great Turkish port on the afternoon of Eugenie's sale, and as she had moved past him among the shipping, that she was named the Black Raven. A suspicious look about her had led the shrewd lieutenant to make a few inquiries concerning her, which resulted in the information that she belonged to a wealthy Turkish country gentleman, who had called at the city to visit Arblan Pasha. So, with his knowledge of her peculiar appearance, and much strategy not reckoned upon by the renegade, the Cowboy Duke had recognized her this stormy morning off the bows of the Mustang, and at once broke into a fierce chase, soon looming up in the rear of the Black Raven, to the infinite surprise of the Renegade Count.

As the snorting yacht of the Cowboy Duke showed plain to the renegade, he at once saw flight could prove but of small avail; the Texan Mustang was at once superior to the Raven in every way from her sailing qualities to her arms, and that some desperate maneuvering or, a hard to hand battle was his only hope.

Glancing toward the barren, unsettled coast, which he was now hugging closely, he spied the narrow mouth of a small river or creek, opening into the sea a short distance ahead. Leaping to the helm and grasping the wheel himself, he swung the Raven about with a swirl that nearly swamped her, and pointed her bow straight at the outlet, making to run her into it, intending to cut and run for it up the river, which showed navigable for a long stretch.

The Mustang seeing the move, cut into the shore to head off the Raven, while shots flashed from her two brass bow-chasers and plowed the water high up in the foamy trail of the fleeing craft, but was too far in the rear to round her and give a broadside, while the renegade's yacht shot into the small mouth of the creek like a projectile, escaping collision with its banks by almost a miracle only.

The Mustang bounded after her but was far less

fortunate, for, being a much larger vessel than the pursued, her prow plowed into the left bank of the creek's mouth with a loud crash, the Black Raven shooting on up the creek, that widened to almost a good sized river as it wound back in the country.

The Renegade Count, quick to see the terrible misfortune to the Cowboy Duke, and one that would necessitate a more or less lengthy delay in his pursuit, was right beside himself with joy, and as he bounded away in the distance, yelled down the river, his voice ringing in a loud blast far over the water:

"Toiled, again! my handsome Lasso Louis, by the Renegade Count!"

CHAPTER XII. THE MONTENEGRINS.

The Black Raven bounded straight on up the river for some miles, then suddenly slowing up close to the river-bank, in a dreary, mountainous portion of the Montenegro country. Here, the renegade ordered an instant examination of the yacht, for she had, all at once almost ceased to move through the water.

Serious trouble was soon ascertained to be the matter with the Raven; her propeller having been hard hit by a shot from the Texan Mustang, had finally broken off clear from its rod, and had sunk somewhere behind in the muddy bottom of the river. Further progress up the river was at once indefinitely delayed, for scarcely any help could be expected from the changeable, whirling mountain breezes.

After a little consideration, the renegade ordered all hands ashore, and with a good store of provisions, bundles of sail-cloth for tents, arms and ammunition, the yacht's company, headed by the Renegade Captain, with poor Eugenie by his side a captive, started up into the mountain country, leaving the yacht securely anchored in a somewhat secluded little cove, with her hatches well nailed down and as secure as possible against invasion, which the renegade considered a secondary condition in this wild, uninhabited region.

The little caravan held steadily on up into the mountains, and it was not till near nightfall that the renegade, feeling himself at last in comparative safety, spoke the glad word, "halt," and ordered camp to be pitched on a small table-land near the edge of a thick mountain forest of tall cypresses.

But just as the first stroke for the camp was being made, a strange band of horsemen rode abruptly out from the edge of the cypress forest in the fast gathering twilight, and drew rein a few feet from where the Renegade Count was standing, giving his orders.

They were a troop of twenty mounted hunters, natives of the wild mountain regions of Montenegro, called Montenegrins, and now returning from a bear-hunt to their camp some miles further over the mountains.

Though the Montenegrins are a rough, warlike race, they are, nevertheless, an intelligent, noble, strong, fine-looking, well-built, hardy people, bold, brave warriors, who would as soon fight as eat, many of the back country living, like our North American Indians, by hunting and fishing, always well armed with pistol and knife, and ever ready to assert and protect their rights. They have frequently been engaged in warfare with the Turks, but like the hardy, brave and strong fighters they are, have ever been able to hold their own, though a small nation, living on in their independence, with a fierce, never-ending hatred existing between them and the Turkish people.

The band of Montenegrin mountain hunters were mounted upon superb Arabian horses, most of them white as snow, all well armed with pistol, yataghan, or Turkish dagger, and long, Turkish rifles, attired in a loose, picturesque garb of red and white stuff, and were strong, noble but fierce, bronzed, dark-bearded hunters, looking like men to whom the taking of life meant nothing should an occasion give the slightest provocation. They were halted now near the Renegade Count, and bending over in their saddles, with their pistols drawn, glared down upon the seeming Turk with their national hatred for a Turk daring from their hawk eyes in dangerous flashes, while the chief of the hunting band, a large, noble-looking rider, spoke, in Turkish, in stern, demanding tones, his pistol resting upon his saddle-pommel and his manner fierce and threatening:

"How is it, sir, that a Turk is trespassing thus suspiciously upon the beloved land of the Montenegrins?"

The Renegade Count, though much taken aback by this sudden surprise, was, of course, somewhat prepared for it; in landing in the land of the Montenegrins, he, knowing something of the country and its people, had realized that, as a real Turk, his reception by the Montenegrins, should be chance to meet any of them, would be far from healthy. But he had soon manufactured a story that he felt sure would not only satisfy the Montenegrins, but at once make them his loyal friends. In full confidence he recounted in broken Turkish promptly to the Montenegrin chief, speaking with a strong French accent that was at once recognized by the intelligent Montenegrin.

"I have come into your treasured land of Montenegro, sir, to seek the protection of the most brave and noble Montenegrins from a band of Turkish pirates, who have chased me into the river lying some miles below here. I am a nobleman of France and was cruising along your coast in my pleasure-yacht, now anchored down in the river, for the health of my poor demented daughter there," pointing to Eugenie some distance away, "and to please whom I attire myself in this costume this morning, when the murderous Turks swooped down upon me, led by a notorious American pirate, who, somehow,

learning the fact, followed me to capture my invalid daughter, thinking to gain a large ransom. They disabled my yacht, but I managed to escape up the river, when finally my craft gave out and I took to the shore, believing that they are still pursuing me. Even as I speak, they may be making their way here, and I beseech you, noble sir, to protect us, for the presence of my faithful crew, here, who are honest French sailors, confirms my story and here are my passports!"

Here the renegade drew from his pocket a Turkish passport, with the signature, "Count Rudolph Fontbe," written plainly in Turkish upon it, for he had not assumed his Turkish disguise until the last moment at Constantinople. The Montenegrin, on hearing the purposely bad Turkish of the renegade, had been almost convinced that his neat story was true, and now, on reading the Turkish passport, was satisfied. He sprung down from his horse, proffered his strong, right hand to the arch-villain, saying in welcome tones:

"The people of France and the people of the land of Montenegro love liberty, and so, for the sake of that the Montenegrin chief is the friend of the French lord, and will protect him and his to the death! To the camp of the Roving Montenegrins we now will journey, where the French lord may rest in peace!"

A little later on the renegade's party, mounted upon the grand white steeds of the roving hunters, Eugenie beside the renegade, was quickly making its way over the mountain wastes, the hardy Montenegrins traveling on foot, all journeying toward the camp lying upon the level top of a mountain of the chief of the Roving Montenegrins, as they were called, the dark, fiendish face of the Renegade Count wearing a covert smile of contemptuous triumph.

CHAPTER XIII. RESCUED.

It was after midnight, and all was dark and silent about the mountain camp of the Roving Montenegrins. The moon shown down dimly from cloud-veiled heavens, in the dusky light of which the twenty white tents of the hunters showed like huge tombs of the dead. Some distance away, at equal distances about the camp, bright night-fires burned to keep off the wild beasts of the mountain forests.

Darkness and quietude reigned inside all the tents but one, and the hardy Montenegrins were wrapped in the sound, refreshing slumber that visits only the free, roving sons of a free, wild land.

But in this one tent a candle flickered, casting about dark, wavering shadows. And amidst these shadows, her face somewhat sad, but for all brave and resolute, on a pile of soft bearskins, reclined Eugenie Chamberlain, not sleeping—far from it—but resting from the fatigue of the day, bound hand and foot.

Just outside the tent, near the flap-door, crouched the Snake Ranchero, partly dozing, partly awake, stationed there by the Renegade Count, who slept soundly in a tent next to Eugenie's, to keep close guard upon her. But the Snake had as good reason to be tired as his master, the renegade so squatting himself right against the flap of the fair captive's tent so as to hear her slightest movement, he rested his chin in his black hands, Indian fashion, and settled himself for a snooze.

But hardly had the hard, regular breathing of the fagged half-breed begun, when there sounded a "whizz!" through the air, and he gave a low, smothered, guttural grunt, seemed to give a sideways leap high in the air, and then came down with a dull thud, and went spinning over the rough ground, rolling over and over far away from the tent, finally stopping, lying stunned and bruised, at the very outposts of the camp. The strange scene had occurred in a flash, almost without sound, and now silence reigned again, and the still, sleepy appearance resumed itself over the camp.

And then it was that two voices sounded thus up from the ground, muffled and low, upon the silent night air some distance away:

"That was a beautiful throw!"

"A tumble that will somewhat postpone his vigilance, I'll go a steer!"

The first speaker was Little Cloud, the second, Lasso Louis.

They were now lying flat upon the grass, about fifty feet from the tent that sheltered Eugenie, and working their way slowly through the grass toward it, crawling along, Indian style, their dark, prostrate forms scarcely showing in the clouded moonlight.

The fact of the Texan Mustang sticking fast into the river-bank that morning, contrary to the speculations of the Renegade Count, did but little to delay his pursuit by the Cowboy Duke. The intrepid, redoubtable young ranger would now stop for nothing save death itself, and landing their two mustangs after some delay, Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, well armed and provisioned, had dashed on up the bank of the river, still keeping up hot pursuit, leaving the yacht to the crew under Lieutenant Lyons, with orders to await their return. In due time they had come upon the abandoned Black Raven, found the faint mountain trail of the renegade's party, followed it like bloodhounds upon the scent, but necessarily with slow, tedious progress, finally fetching up in the vicinity of the camp of the Roving Montenegrins just a little while after their arrival thereto with the caravan of the Renegade Count. They had kept in discreet seclusion until midnight, then, leaving their mustangs in a thick grove behind the camp, had crept in upon the sleeping Montenegrins, Lasso Louis playing his imita-

ble lariat trick upon the Snake Ranchero as the first stroke for the rescue of Eugenie, which the Cowboy Duke had sworn to effect that night or meet death in its attempt, for he realized, indeed, that in a battle—if it should come to that—with the fierce Montenegrin warriors, death would stare him boldly in the face. He had read of the Montenegrins, and well knew that he was matching himself against a set of most deadly warriors. He also saw that through some strategy the renegade had established himself in their good graces, and understood that they would, of course, protect him to the death. However, Eugenie must be rescued, if he had to wage fight against a thousand Montenegrins.

"I move," said Little Cloud, "that we take a look at this merry sentinel."

Lasso Louis agreed, and the two young rangers made their way carefully to the motionless body of the half-breed Apache.

"Great heavens!" whispered the Cowboy Duke, "it is the Snake Ranchero! We were right, Cloudy, it was he who heard and gave my secret to the renegade, and as reward has been made his right-hand man. The plot thickens! But now for Eugenie's rescue!"

Back toward the tent of the captive Eugenie the young plainsmen made their way, noiselessly, like Indian riders. Nearer and nearer they slowly crawled, ever and anon raising their heads from the grass, like trailing serpents, till at last the hand of Lasso Louis touched the flap of Eugenie's tent.

"This must be the tent, for here the Snake was on guard!" whispered Louis. His hand closed over the edge of the flap, and drew it gently to one side, and he peered cautiously within.

There, still reclining upon the pile of bearskins, with her eyes half-closed, her head resting upon her two bound hands was his fair cousin Eugenie, the somber shadows of the dim, flickering candle playing fantastically about her.

"She may make some outcry at the surprise, and betray us!" whispered Little Cloud, hastily. "The renegade is most likely in the next tent, and the slightest sound might prove the death of us!"

"Hush!" said the Cowboy Duke. And raising himself upon his feet, he made one soft, catlike bound upon the skins beside Eugenie, and before she could move or utter a sound, he had placed his hand gently over her mouth, at the same time whispering in her ear the words:

"Not a word, Eugenie! It is I, Lasso Louis! When I have cut your bonds, follow me and speak not!"

In a trice the Cowboy Duke drew his knife and laid in twain the bonds of the young girl. In another moment they were outside the tent. Here Lasso Louis took the young maiden up quickly into his iron arms, as though she had been but a babe and followed by Little Cloud, they made their way stealthily across the sleeping camp, toward the dark little grove where the mustangs were in waiting.

Little Cloud reaching it in advance, hastily brought out his trusty little horse, followed by Prairie Boy, to the edge of the grove, saying in low, hurried tones:

"Here, Miss Eugenie, you can ride my mustang, and I will follow on behind on foot, for, as Louis knows, I can run almost as fast as the mustang, and when safe from the camp, you can wait till I come up."

"How kind of you, Little Cloud, but it don't—"

"Not a word, Miss Eugenie! Life depends upon it!"

"Little Cloud is right, Eugenie," spoke Lasso Louis. "He can run like a young deer, and the occasion justifies it. You and I must fly at once together, for I must protect you to night with my own life!"

At this Eugenie submitted herself to be mounted upon Little Cloud's mustang, and Lasso Louis springing lightly astride Prairie Boy, the trio moved slowly, and noiselessly as possible, out of the still silent and sleeping camp, marching quickly down the mountain-side toward the valley—that lay below, intending to follow on along the level river-bank to where the Texan Mustang was lying.

But Eugenie was fated to no such rescue as this now promised to be. Just as the white tent-tops of the Montenegrins was fading from view in the shadowy moonlight, the shrill, unearthly yell of an Apache war-whoop sounded up from the silent camp and rung far over the mountain-tops, like the death-knell of the three fugitive.

The tough Snake Ranchero, had, coming suddenly to his senses and realizing that something terrible had happened, set up an Indian yell that even startled the hardy Montenegrins.

Then the Renegade Count, quick to catch the first vibration of the yelp from the recovered half-breed, broke out of his tent in a flash and bounded into the one that had been assigned his captive. Finding it empty, his rage transformed him into a demon incarnate. He set up a shout as loud as that of the Snake and that brought the already aroused Montenegrins bounding to his side.

In a few seconds he explained that the terrible "Turkish pirates" had surprised them and carried off his "dear, demented daughter."

In a few more seconds many of the Montenegrins had mounted their hunting steeds, and headed by the chief, the Renegade Count, and the Snake Ranchero, dashed to the edge of the mountain-top; the chief, peering far down toward the valley of the river with his keen, trained eagle eyes, finally discerned in the hazy distance the dim outlines of the flying fugitives and galloped down the mountain slope in desperate chase, followed by the renegade and his troop of hunters.

"They are mounted and after us!" shouted Little Cloud, in the meantime leaping after the mustangs

of Eugenie and Lasso Louis, like the expert Indian runner he was, hearing the dull thunder of horses' hoofs.

The Cowboy Duke spoke not, but held closer upon the bridle of Eugenie's mustang and pressed his silver spurs to the flanks of Prairie Boy, while the brave young maiden held firm her seat upon the mustang's back and rode with surprising skill.

The thunder of trampling hoofs grew louder and louder, and soon the Cowboy Duke, looking behind him, saw the mounted band of Montenegrins, fifteen in number, hunting him closely in the rear. Again he saw that the speed of Arab horses was too much for lagged, wounded mustangs, and knew that flight was useless.

"You ride on to the river below, Eugenie," he cried. "Follow the river bank straight to the westward and you will come upon my yacht! and Little Cloud and I will hold the Montenegrins at bay till your escape is made good as possible, and will meet you there if we live!"

"Must it be done Louis?" cried the maiden, as the Montenegrins came closer and closer in their rear.

"Yes! away, Eugenie! for the love of Heaven, or the lives of us three may pay the forfeit of delay!"

The brave, sensible maiden, at the beseeching advice of Lasso Louis, bounded on ahead, the Cowboy Duke wheeling about to face the oncoming horsemen, shouting as he did so:

"Keep on the outside as much as possible, Cloudy! and shield yourself as much as you can! for I have robbed you of your horse and you must not follow me into the fray on foot!"

"Don't mind me, Louis!" cried the loyal, plucky Little Cloud. "It won't amount to so much if I am done for! But I'm bound to give them a bit of Apache fighting before I do go!"

The Montenegrins now burst upon them, coming upon a level plateau, well suited for a battle-ground. The charge was necessarily a wild, haphazard one, however, and the Cowboy Duke, spurring his remarkably obedient mustang with a bound to one side, survived it without a scratch. The Montenegrins wheeled quietly about to charge again.

As they had dashed by him in the now less obscured moonlight, the young ranger's keen eyes were quick to note one advantage in his favor: the Montenegrins, through their haste to get into pursuit, were only half armed, but few having their long single-barreled pistols, and others only their slim Turkish short swords; the chief and renegade, though, were fairly well armed.

But the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud were perfectly prepared, the former with two of his favorite self-cockers, a splendid Winchester repeater and knife.

The Renegade Count bounded up in advance toward Lasso Louis, and for the first time noted that Eugenie was nowhere to be seen. With a fierce curse at the young ranger, he made to break away in the direction of the river valley below, divining the move the girl fugitive had made, but ere he was fairly off, a shot from the repeater of Lasso Louis once again dropped his horse from under him and the renegade plunged with a yell of rage to the earth, lying stunned where he fell.

This done the crafty Cowboy Duke now caused the fight to become a wild, confused *mêlée* by galloping round and round the band of horsemen, Western Indian fashion, bounding forward, then wheeling instantly about and charging in their rear. He surprised them constantly on every hand, and poured out volley after volley from his self-cockers, riding hanging down flat against the side of his horse, and shooting from under his broad neck continually into his antagonist with deadly effect, Little Cloud blazing away from his rear.

The Montenegrins, surprised, confused, dumfounded at this strange warfare, dropped fast from their horses, being baffled in every attempt to shoot or unhorse the flying Cowboy Duke, who, shielded by his mustang, fought and maneuvered like an Apache warrior gone mad. His blood was up and coursed like fire through his veins, his muscles swelled out with an iron strength, and, hanging down from his saddle beside Prairie Boy, as a snake from a tree, he flew about the jumbled mass of horsemen, snooting and beating them down, like some enraged vulture of their wild mountains.

Suddenly, the Snake Ranchero, mounted upon a fine steed, singled himself out from the *mêlée* and watching his chance, dashed up, alongside of Lasso Louis with one of the Turkish daggers gleaming in his hand. But his opportunity did not last, for his victim chanced to bound off to one side, and seeing the intended murderous action, cried:

"Well, I guess not, you serpent!" and an instant later the half-breed's head bounded clean off his shoulders to the earth, and went crashing over the rough stones, trailing after it a long, dark line and looking in the white moonlight like a fleeing snake with a human face, the headless rider quickly toppling down from the horse to the ground.

So ended the Snake Ranchero. Lasso Louis's revolvers and rifle being empty at the time, he had snatched a coiled rawhide lariat from his saddle and hurling it at the murderous Ranchero the sharp-edged lasso had cut his head clean from his body.

The Cowboy Duke quickly shoved a handful of cartridges into his Winchester while the dumfounded Montenegrins were recovering from their unbounded surprise. Little Cloud, having his first chance to mount one of the riderless Arab horses, threw himself over the back of the Snake's steed, and the fray continued.

Soon but two riders had survived the fierce, double-fire of Lasso Louis and Little Cloud, the Montenegrin chief and one of his warriors. A second later the latter rolled from his horse at a crack from the rifle

of Little Cloud, and down upon them swooped the great chief alone, his eyes flashing like an eagle's in his terrible rage.

Here the tide turned. Little Cloud dropped his rifle, and Lasso Louis suddenly found that he had not a cartridge left. The Montenegrin halted a second, snatched up the fallen repeater and made to level it at the breast of the Cowboy Duke.

"Run for it!" shouted Lasso Louis to Little Cloud, spurring Prairie Boy instantly to one side and dashing down the mountain-side with his Indian friend. The chief broke away after them, emptying the repeater in their wake as he rode.

As they neared a dark, wide mountain chasm, Little Cloud slipped from his horse, shot in the shoulder by the chasing chief, while the Cowboy Duke, unable to halt on the brink of the chasm, spurred his horse for the mad leap and, coming within an ace of tumbling backward down its depths, landed in safety upon the opposite bank, the riderless horse dropping into the dark pitfall.

On came the flying Montenegrin. He saw the chasm show like a black streak ahead and prepared for the leap, but his steed, stumbling badly over the body of Little Cloud, jumped wide of the opposite bank and with its rider went crashing down to death into the black space.

CHAPTER X V.

FACE TO FACE AT LAST.

WHEN Little Cloud had dropped from his horse at the shot from the Montenegrin chief it had not been death, but he had sunk to the ground in a dead swoon from the excruciatingly painful shoulder wound. The bullet had grazed the shoulder-bone, passing through a small portion of the fleshy part of the armpit, causing a bad though not fatal wound. The horse of the flying Montenegrin chief had stumbled over his tough, high-booted legs only and though they were somewhat cut and bruised, no bones were broken. After a swoon of fifteen minutes he was now sitting up and looking in a dazed manner about him.

He sat thus for a few moments, when up dashed a horseman, and the Cowboy Duke, bareheaded, covered with dust, Prairie Boy scarred and bleeding a little in some places, but the rider and horse looking otherwise in fair shape cried out in surprised, but cheerful, joyful tones.

"Not dead, Cloudy? Thank Heaven!" The clear voice of his old friend brought Little Cloud's scattered senses quickly to him and he staggered to his feet, saying:

"Louis, it was pretty near a go, but I guess I'm worth a dozen dead men yet!"

Lasso Louis laughed merrily at the plucky, spirited Little Cloud, and dressing his wound as best he could, circumstances permitted, Little Cloud was gently mounted upon Prairie Boy, and mounting himself, after some delay, an Arab steed of one of the fallen Montenegrins, that had been grazing at a short distance off, the two moved slowly down toward the river valley, for Little Cloud's condition would permit but slow progress, crossing the chasm some distance to the southward where it was naturally bridged.

Lasso Louis, on landing safely upon the bank of the chasm, had at once rode on to the northward along the edge to find a crossing place. Coming to where the chasm grew quite narrow, he bounded easily over it and made quickly back to ascertain if Little Cloud were really dead.

They now rode on together hoping to overtake Eugenie or find her safe on the mustang, and talking joyously of their success.

As they rode upon an elevation commanding a fair view of the mountain slopes above, Little Cloud, pointing upward, said:

"Look up there, Louis!"

Upward in the distance they could see quite plainly in the first light of the morning the scene of the recent fray upon the mountain plateau. There, piled upon each other and stretched about were the fallen Montenegrins, some dead, others wounded, their horses floundering about in the throes of death, all showing in the now red flush of the morning, one writhing, groaning, dying mass of man and beast, in the last quivering agony of death!

"Heaven, forgive us!" spoke the Cowboy Duke, reverently, turning away his head in sickening horror, the two riding on in silence.

Toward noon they halted near the river for half an hour. A pair of rabbits Louis managed to lasso were roasted, the horses were watered and baited, Little Cloud's wound bathed and re-dressed, and much refreshed, the hardy young rangers followed westward down the river, hoping before night to overtake Eugenie, who they knew would be compelled to ride slowly, inexperienced horsewoman as she was.

As the first shadows of twilight gathered over the valley, the young bordermen arrived at a grove of trees that stretched along the river-bank. Just as they were about to emerge from it three startling words sounded from the outside to their ears.

"Advance one step, sir! and I pull the trigger!"

Out from the grove they dashed, and beheld a strange scene.

A little way from the edge of the grove was Eugenie Chamberlain upon the mustang of Little Cloud, her face flushed and angered, her black eyes sparkling with a terrible light, and holding in her outstretched right hand a gleaming revolver. A rod in front of her, mounted upon a superb Arab horse, his dark face distorted with chagrin and rage was the Renegade Count, who had halted in his tracks at the shrill, determined words of Eugenie!

While the excitement of the fray had been at its height, the irrepressible villain being, to all appearance dead, but after all only severely bruised and

sunned, had finally recovered enough to climb upon a riderless horse, and sneak away unseen toward the river valley, hoping to overtake Eugenie. He had ridden down upon her at last from behind a range of hills just as the young rangers had entered the little grove below along the river-bank.

"Great heaven! The demon still lives!" exclaimed Little Cloud.

The Cowboy Duke uttered no word, but over his bronzed face came a look as black as a storm-cloud, his teeth ground together, his eyes flashed fire. He rode quickly up to the scene, halting between the two, then spoke in calm, gentle tones:

"Drop your firearm, Eugenie, and you and Little Cloud repair to the edge of that grove!"

The young girl gave a glad cry of surprise, but noting the terrible expression on the Cowboy Duke's face, said no more, and, followed by Little Cloud, rode obediently from the scene, halted, and stared in silence upon the strange tableau.

Over the dark face of the Renegade Count came an expression of fiendish wrath, then he grew deadly pale as the glaring, piercing eyes of Lasso Louis fixed themselves upon him. He had been balked, surprised, and sat strangely immovable upon his superb Arab steed. His hand was upon his revolver, but he dared not move that hand, for from the first he had been constantly "covered" by Lasso Louis. And he well knew what he now had to do—stand and face the just wrath of the Cowboy Duke, face it to the death.

For some moments an ominous silence prevailed between the two, then the Cowboy Duke spoke, his voice ringing and stern, strange and commanding, his flashing gold-mounted self-cocker resting lightly upon the pommel of his saddle, but leveled ever at the breast of the renegade.

"Throw your arms, sir, into that river!"

A flash of fiercest rage darted from the evil eyes of the renegade, and he was about to howl out a vile curse of defiance; but the gold-mounted revolver of the Cowboy Duke, having been loaded from some of Little Cloud's cartridges, gleamed just the significantly, as did the dark, angered eyes of the powerful youth who held it. The renegade wisely obeyed, and with slow, dogged movements, tossed one by one his weapons into the stream that blinked and sparkled lazily along-side in the sunlight.

As the last weapon of the renegade splashed into the water, the Cowboy Duke tossed all his own arms and knife far over the ground, saying but the few words:

"Now, Count Fontbellvue! it is your life or mine!"

As he spoke the Cowboy Duke spurred his mustang quickly up to the renegade, and leaping clear from his saddle, with a tiger-like spring, hurled himself upon his enemy, dragging him down from his horse and bearing him to the earth. The act was so sudden, so panther-like, that the renegade found himself flat upon the ground in the iron clutch of the Cowboy Duke ere he could put himself upon the defensive. He now writhed like a snake in the arms of Lasso Louis, but he was held to the earth as though pressed down by some mighty weight, and tight about his serpentine neck were gripped the wiry fingers of the young ranger, who, with one of his huge, muscular legs, held the villain almost motionless beneath him.

"Diel! accursed snake!" ground out the enraged Cowboy Duke in his just wrath. "Diel like the vile viper you are!"

Tighter and tighter grew the hard, relentless grip about the renegade's throat; his dark face grew black and bloated with the choked-up blood, the jaw dropped and the eyes rolled up white in their sockets, the thus distorted, demon-like face making it seem to the Cowboy Duke as though, indeed, it was some crawling serpent from whom life was being crushed, instead of a human being.

"Mercy! mercy!" gasped the choking renegade, in a hoarse, faint whisper.

"Such mercy as you have shown to me and mine, I now show to you!" hissed the young ranger. "Tis the reckoning come at last!—your righteous doom is upon you!"

"Mercy!—I am—dying!" whispered the renegade, in almost inaudible gasps. "Mercy!—for God's sake—mercy!"

At these words, as if recovering from some mad nightmare, the Cowboy Duke loosened his hold about the villain's neck, withdrew his knee from his chest, and rose up, towering above his fallen victim in all his strong, handsome manhood, like some young Roman gladiator of old; and looking down upon the limp wretch at his feet with contemptuous, loathing gaze, spoke thus:

"Mercy? Yes! Who are you, that I should stoop so low as to kill? God forbid! for you are not worthy of my steel!"

The renegade's life and strength slowly returning, he raised himself upon his elbow and gazed upward at the Cowboy Duke, as a whipped cur might at his master, saying feebly, in beseeching tones:

"Spurn me! call down the wrath of your God upon my guilty soul! but spare my life—spare me from the seething Hell that now awaits me! and I swear to you by the memory of my dead mother, that I will never return to America, that I will go to France and end my days in such peace and absolution as God may grant me!"

At this moment Eugenie and Little Cloud rode up. "Yes, spare him, Louis!" spoke the gentle, kind-hearted girl; "spare him to repentance."

Little Cloud looked silently on, with dark, angered eyes. The Indian love of revenge was in him, and at first he longed to plunge his knife deep into the black heart of the fallen villain. But the kind words of the fair young girl soothed his savage breast, and he, too, heard the voice of his really

manly conscience, and hearkened not to the Indian law of a life for a life.

"Yes, I can not kill him," said the Cowboy Duke. "Let him live on and keep his vow."

Turning to the servile, crouching wretch, he said: "Count Fontbellvue, I shall spare your life; but at the first sign of further wrong from you to me or mine, I deal death to you as I would to a dog! Now, sir, begone!"

The renegade, weak, but able to stand, rose from the ground, slunk away to where his horse had wandered, mounted and rode quickly away up the river for the Montenegrin camp, really thankful and repentant.

But whether he would have kept his solemn vow did not remain to be seen, for as he presently turned from the river and followed up the mountain-side, the trio, silently watching his departure, saw with startled eyes a strange doom swoop down upon the retreating renegade. Just as he was following along the narrow brink of a deep mountain precipice, he was suddenly met by five horsemen, who instantly upon getting alongside, snatched the renegade from his steed and hurled him far over the precipice, his body crashing down the steep, rough wall to the bottom, and there lying a mangled, bloody carcass—dead.

The five horsemen were the Montenegrins who had remained with the crew of the Black Raven at the camp the night before, and on getting no tidings of the fifteen who had formed the pursuing party, had started out that morning to search for them. They finally came upon the terrible scene of the fray, and from one half-dead warrior, had learned that the Cowboy Duke and Little Cloud had survived the fray. Caring for the dying Montenegrin as best they could in his last moments, they had, at his almost immediate death, started in pursuit of the young rangers, having soon found their trail.

Presently they had come upon the scene of the death of their chief, and then it was that the fierce, hot-tempered Montenegrins suddenly realized that the "French lord" had himself brought all this terrible misfortune upon them, and that he had, no matter how indirectly, caused the death of the chief, whom they revered and loved as a god. They instantly flew into a murderous rage and vowed dark vengeance upon him, of course understanding, on not seeing him among their slain, that he had gone on in the pursuit of the "pirates," which latter they also swore to revenge themselves upon. Coming upon the renegade in the height of their mad wrath, they at once gave vent to it by taking his life as narrated, and thus ending what had been a most vile and terrible career.

And now noting the two "pirates," with the "demented daughter" as their captive, as they thought, down on the river-bank in the distance, the Montenegrins led away in hot pursuit, while, to add terror to this new misfortune besetting the brave trio below, one of the sudden hurricanes common on the Adriatic Coast, gathered black and ominous overhead, and threatened to shortly burst upon them.

CHAPTER XV.

SAVED!

WHEN the little party on the river-bank noted the five Montenegrins hurl the Renegade Count over the precipice, all felt relieved in their hearts, but the next minute realized that a new terror menaced them, and endeavored to escape the keen eyes of the Montenegrins by riding quickly into the little grove. But they soon observed that they had been seen and that the horsemen were galloping down the mountain slopes in their pursuit; and the Cowboy Duke, gathering together his arms from where he had tossed them, they once again became fugitives and fled fast down the river, hoping to reach the yacht, which the Cowboy Duke felt lay but a few miles away. They had one advantage over the Montenegrins—level ground to follow, while their progress was considerably impeded by the rocky mountain-sides, so kept well in advance.

After a mile or so of flight with a good distance maintained from their pursuers, Little Cloud gave a shout of joy. Through the dim twilight they could see the coast, showing white but a little way off.

Spurring up their animals to a last, desperate spurt, they reached the mouth of the river, with the Montenegrins tearing on behind them now not a hundred yards in the rear while a volley from their pistols whizzed over their heads.

As they dashed upon the bank of the river's mouth, cries of dismay broke from the fugitives. The Texan Mustang was no where to be seen!

At this moment the hurricane burst over them with all the terrible fury of a South sea storm. Down fell the rain as from an emptied river; the thunder rumbled over the mountains like the sound of some city hurled to atoms by an earthquake, while the lightning flashed and flashed again and split asunder the low, black clouds overhead, reaching down from the dark-shrouded arch of heaven to the wind-swept earth, like the long, forked, fiery tongue of a monstrous dragon.

"The yacht is gone and we are lost!" cried Eugenie, in her dismay.

"Never," spoke the Cowboy Duke, the strange, set, determined look that ever came there in the time of such danger as beset them now, overspreading his face.

The next instant a voice sounded above the storm up over the river-bank from a little below where they had come up, shouting:

"Aho! there, Lasso Louis!"

A few moments later the dark form of a burly man crawled, quickly up over the bank and rushed

through the gloom toward the Cowboy Duke, at tired in the sailor uniform of the Texan Mustang.

"Ay, ay! the Mustang sailor!" answered Lasso Louis, recognizing the sailor in a flash of lightning.

"Quick, sir, right this way!"

In a moment the party dismounted and clambered after the sailor down the river-bank, as the Montenegrins dashed up and beat madly about the bank in the darkness in search of the fugitives.

At the water's edge was moored a stanch life-boat of the Mustang provided with a sail. Into it bounded the Cowboy Duke, Eugenie clasped tight in his arms, then Little Cloud followed by the sailor, who quickly cut the moorings and shoved the boat out into the river. Four sailors, who had been waiting in the life-boat, seized their oars, and the little craft made a bound out toward the sea.

As she did so, five dark, dripping forms, with gleaming knives between their teeth suddenly clambered over the sides of the boat like water-serpents. They were the Montenegrins, who, in the mean time, by a vivid flash of lightning, had caught sight of the fugitives in the life-boat, and, leaping from their horses, they had plunged down the bank and into the water just as the sailors dipped their oars for their first stroke. Being expert swimmers, and rendered doubly strong in their savage, frantic wrath, they had reached the craft almost in their first fierce plunge from the shore, and, with their movements unheeded and themselves unseen in the roar and darkness of the raging tempest, now surprised the boat's crew with a mad onslaught.

Three managed to board the boat, but the other two were beaten off by the Cowboy Duke, who dealt them stunning blows with an oaken boat hook, and they sunk quickly beneath the waves. The three flung themselves into the crew like devils gone mad. The four sailors, surprised before they could place themselves upon the defensive, were soon weltering in their blood in the bottom of the boat, the frantic Montenegrins then leaping upon Lasso Louis and Little Cloud and the remaining sailor.

Eugenie had been carried at once to the prow of the boat, and lying flat down, escaped injury from the fray. Up and down, right and left rocked the little craft, threatening every moment to capsize, and now half-filled with water, while the raging storm, shifting somewhat to the eastward, bore it out to the sea.

Suddenly, over the side of the boat went Little Cloud and the sailor, both locked tight in the embrace of a Montenegrin, and all disappearing in the waves and darkness. The remaining Montenegrin, knife in hand, sprung upon the Cowboy Duke.

The young ranger was ready for the charge, and drove out his strong right arm as the Montenegrin fell upon him, the hard-clinched fist landing full in his face, while the left hand of Lasso Louis drove his knife to the hilt into the side of the burtsman, as he fell over from the staggering blow. Quickly seizing his writhing body in his iron clutch, the Cowboy Duke flung the Montenegrin far over the boat's side, shouting as he did so the name of Little Cloud; but no answer sounded back through the blackness.

"He is drowned!" cried Eugenie, in saddest tones, in spite of the distracting terror of the hour.

"God forbid!" spoke Lasso Louis, "but I fear he has gone to the bottom!"

The storm now increased in its fury and became a perfect tornado. The winds tore along the coast straight now from the North in a deafening gale, the breakers rolled in like mountains and darkness grew black as the tomb.

"Courage! Eugenie!" shouted the lion-hearted Cowboy Duke, clasping the waist of the fair girl, as the mast and sail were torn from the prow. His courage seemed to increase as the tempest grew its worst, his nerves turned to iron, as it were, and his strength rose up as if to defy the very storm itself.

With the young girl clasped tightly in his left arm, he seized the tiller with his right, righted the boat to a degree, while it flew on down the coast before the gale, its timbers cracking, its destruction seeming but the question of each moment.

And, indeed, a few moments later there sounded a splitting crash which thundered out over the waters to join in the tumult of the tempest and the little craft parted at its center, and the Cowboy Duke with the young maiden still clasped tight in his embrace, was hurled from his post down into the black, raging sea.

Far from where the waters first swallowed them, they arose out of a wave's crest, and by a quick effort of Lasso Louis, who had ever been a water-dog as well as ranger, floated for a few seconds above sea, holding his fair cousin so that she might take breath. Ere they sunk again, a huge wave lifted them to its height, and with an almost stunning force, the Cowboy Duke felt himself thrown suddenly against some hard surface, and though in the dense blackness about him he could see nothing, the hard surface was the side of a large, anchored craft.

Recovering himself, Lasso Louis threw up one arm above the water and by the merest chance it caught a low bow-chain of the craft. As one making a last effort to save two lives, the young ranger grasped the slippery link of the chain, wound his limbs about it, while he felt himself with his fair burden lifted up from the waters as the craft rode high upon a wave's summit.

With the full vividness of a sudden flash of lightning, the Cowboy Duke gazed upward, as the vessel hung motionless for a moment upon the wave.

"Thank God!" he gasped, with his eyes transfixed; up through the rigging above his head, under the carved figurehead, he saw the lightning-lit gold letters, *Texas Mustang!*

With his strength renewed and holding the young maiden, who had swooned from the concussion

against the vessel's side, held in a tighter hold, the young borderman made a grand, noble struggle to ascend the yacht's rigging.

About him howled and raged the tempest, the bow of the yacht plunged down beneath the black waves, the mad waters washed about him like black clinging dragons, with a thundering roar, threatening each moment to tear him from his hold. Once he shouted loud for help but his voice was drowned in the deafening roar and he fought bravely alone the mad elements, drawing himself, with the faintest maiden in one arm, little by little upward amidst the rigging and at last reached the bowsprit. As he did so, his hand came in contact with the cold, drenched body of a youth!

"Little Cloud!" cried the Cowboy Duke, in a great transport of joy, for in the vivid flashes of lightning that now followed in quick succession, he saw the figure of his loyal little friend hanging onto the bowsprit like grim death, but exhausted and about to swoon and fall from his shoulder wound, from which the red blood now oozed, dripping down to stain the black waters beneath.

Placing the limp form of the maiden over one shoulder, the young ranger Hercules lifted Little Cloud, now, too, in a swoon, over the other, and thus weighted down, but his young giant strength and well trained muscles equal to even a greater task, he crawled along the bowsprit, finally landing upon the fore-deck of the yacht safely, his two faintest charges still hanging over each shoulder.

"Saved!" cried the Cowboy Duke, in his great joy at his thus saving two lives from the dark, horrible death that but for him would have been ended in a black, watery grave.

CHAPTER XVI. HOME.

As the storm had first threatened to burst upon the coast, the Texan Mustang, successfully extricated from the narrow mouth of the river, and with but small damage after all, had been lying anchored but a short way out off the beach. Seeing that the storm was to be a fierce one, Lieutenant Lyons at once ordered steam up and put down the coast for about a mile, there running into a small bay or cove and casting anchor in such shelter as it offered, leaving a life-boat of the yacht manned by five of the crew to await the Cowboy Duke and party at the mouth of the river, as Lasso Louis was afterward informed.

Little Cloud accounted for turning up so strangely upon the bowsprit thus: in his tussle with the Montenegrin in the water after the fall over the side of the life boat, he had finally triumphed by remaining under water with the Montenegrin locked tight in his embrace, until the latter, unable to hold his breath with the expert little water-dog, had weakened, sinking down to his death, the other Montenegrin and the sailor meeting, in all likelihood, a similar fate, as the raging tempest had at once swept them seaward. Later, swimming upon the stump of a tree, he had mounted it and had been quickly floated on down the raging coast somewhat in advance of the Cowboy Duke. Driving into the breakers that swirled from the sea around into the small bay, he had been washed into the bow-rigging of the mustang, there found a little later by the Cowboy Duke as related.

Thus miraculously, yet mainly through the might of their hard Western training, had the brave and daring young Texan rangers survived this last doubly frightful and dangerous adventure, the like of which, however, had ever been repeated through their bold and reckless lives, for no other reason, probably, than that they had no fear of death, and on no occasion hesitated to battle with it hand-to-hand.

The next morning dawned bright and smiling over the Adriatic Coast, and the Mustang put out of the bay and ran up to the river's mouth above. Not a body could be seen floating on the waters, or washed ashore, or a vestige of the battle of the night before. The sea had swallowed well her victims.

But standing upon the river-bank, whinnying out a glad welcome as the yacht approached, were the two hardy little mustangs of the young rangers. During the storm they had followed their animal instincts, and found shelter in a small forest some distance away, and had now been grazing in company with some of the Montenegrin horses upon the river-bank. They were quickly taken aboard, and, putting about, the yacht bowled on down the sunlit coast.

"Now for America, the home of the brave and the land of the free!" shouted the Cowboy Duke, walking along the deck to where stood Eugenie and Little Cloud.

"Yes!" cried that young ranger, merry and lively in spite of his wound, "back to dear old Texas and Chamberlain Ranch!"

"And the land I am almost dying to see again!" spoke Eugenie, feeling in a transport of gladness, though looking pale and somewhat worn from her recent great fatigue. "And now," she continued, speaking in grave and most thankful tones, "let me say her, Cousin Louis, that I can never thank you and your friend Little Cloud one-half, for the great good you have done for me, but God will bless you both, I know, and in my nightly prayers I shall pray for you always, and I know Heaven will hear my prayers, and keep you and Little Cloud from harm; and at last, when the Judgment Day comes, God will give you such rewards as are not of this earth."

A tear stood in the eye of the Cowboy Duke and a lump rose up in his throat, while he felt an emotion at the touching words and manner of the thankful young girl, surge through his strong frame that he turned away to control. Little Cloud's dark, rag-

ged face grew soft, and for the first time since his childhood, he shed two big tears that fell with a splash upon the deck.

Eugenie, seeing the emotion of the manly young rangers, turned quickly away, knowing that to the bold, reckless young bordermen their unusual though manly display of feeling was embarrassing.

But never in their lives afterward did Lasso Louis and Little Cloud forget those beautiful words of thanks and blessing of the fair young maiden for whose sake they had faced death so many times.

The Texan Mustang held straight on down the Adriatic and in due time bounded into the blue, sunny waves of the Mediterranean Sea.

Without further adventures or dangers, but after a pleasant voyage, during which all explanations followed as to what had occurred to each in their absence from the other, and a hundred beautiful plans were made by the young rangers and Eugenie for the bright future, the Mustang finally rode bravely into the French seaport of Marseilles.

Here we will leave the two young rangers and the fair maiden, for a space of some weeks.

At the end of that time, you, kind reader, are respectfully invited to attend—not personally of course, for you are a little too late for that, and to your sorrow, for you would have spent one of the finest of afternoons, but in imagination—a grand reception, or "time," as ranch boys called it, given at the Chamberlain Ranch in honor of the return of its present owner, the Cowboy Duke, his fair cousin Eugenie and Little Cloud.

The little party had arrived at the ranch in the morning, mustangs and all and now, in the afternoon, a beautiful picture presents itself: the great ranch, built up brand new, is the scene of the height of merriment and jollification. Long tables are spread beneath the large shady oaks and chestnuts of the fine dwelling-house, loaded down with solid eatables and all the season's delicacies, and about them are seated the whole force of the ranch boys, some fifty in number. At the main table presides the Cowboy Duke, elegantly attired in his favorite brown velvet corduroy, a fine diamond sparkling on his flowing silk tie, and his handsome, bronzed face wreathed in sunny smiles. He is bowing gracefully right and left at toasts and congratulations coming heartily from his young ranchmen flanked down the table from him. At his right hand sits Eugenie, shy, but smiling, and her face lit up with a glad, happy light, while half of the young rangers, who are already dead in love with her sweet innocent face and sparkling black eyes, cast glances of honest admiration at her; at his left sits Little Cloud, now strong as ever, his dark face full of laughter and making the young rangers near him shout with merriment at his strange stories of what he had seen abroad. Near by are grazing, in animal happiness, Prairie Boy and Little Cloud's mustang, ever and anon raising their short necks from the ground and looking over at the tables full of rangers, as sounds of merriment float upward from them.

All now understand that Eugenie is the orphan cousin of Lasso Louis, and that he went abroad to some far away country, where she had lived, to bring her to America for her education at the dying wish of his father, and that while going and returning he and Little Cloud met with many strange adventures and hairbreadth escapes from death. More than this they do not know and do not ask to know, for of course there was nothing remarkable in the idea.

Suddenly, up from the table arise loud shouts as the meal ends and wine is served.

"Three cheers for Lasso Louis, the Cowboy Duke!" cries Little Cloud, and instantly three deafening cheers ring up from the fifty lusty throats and far over the plain.

"Three cheers for Miss Eugenie!" again cries Little Cloud, and Eugenie's ears are nearly deafened with hurrahs.

"And now!" says the Cowboy Duke, "three rousers for Little Cloud, Texan ranger and hail fellow!"

Three more cheers float upward and the dark cheeks of the loyal little fellow flush with pride and pleasure.

Thus continues the afternoon in pleasure and merry-making, and as it ends, each ranger is presented with a brand new suit of finest velvet corduroy to wear on Sundays, and from which they were named, the "Velvet Rangers," and every one of them went to bed that night happy as morning larks.

So ended the rescuing of the lost Texan heiress. Arblath Pasha never knew what became of the "wealthy country Turkish gentleman" who bought his slave "Zara" and did not care, getting out of the whole matter as he did to the tune of seventy-five thousand dollars.

The renegade crew left at the camp of the Roving Montenegrins finally reached France in the Black Raven, a sorry and disappointed lot.

Eugenie Chamberlain was sent to Vassar to be thoroughly educated, returning in due time to her estates in East Texas, and some time afterward became known as the "Texas Cattle Queen." The Cowboy Duke made the Chamberlain Ranch soon one of the most extensive cattle-raising institutions in Texas, and himself became popular far and near, and was admired by all for his deeds of charity, for ever righting wrongs of the then rough border, bringing evil-doers to justice, and holding out a helping hand to all in need. His career ever afterward was marked by many dangers, wonderful escapes from death and wild adventures in his actions to see right done to those wronged, and vowed when he became the Duke of Chamberlain and came into possession of his vast estates in France

he would spend every dollar of them if need be in breaking up the outlawry of the border and doing away with its dangers and depredations.

Little Cloud shortly became one of the "bosses" of the ranch, and was ever the right-hand man of the Cowboy Duke in all things and together, loyal, trusty friends, they became the terror of the outlaws, road-agents, and all desperadoes of the frontier.

THE END.

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